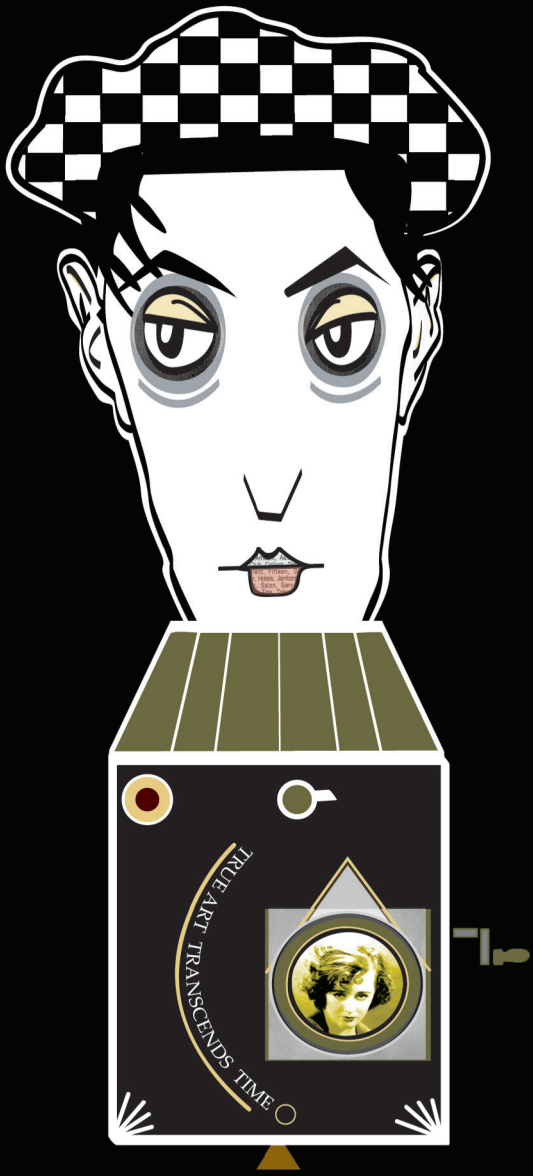

SAN FRANCISCO

SILENT

FILM FESTIVAL

MAY 1-5, 2019 CASTRO THEATRE SILENTFILM.ORG

Welcome to the 24th San Francisco Silent Film Festival!

Once again SFSFF is happy to present a tantalizing array of silent-era classics and newly revived discoveries as they were meant to be experienced–with live musical accompaniment. Cinematic treasures from ten different countries– Bali, Czechoslovakia, France, Germany, India, Italy, Japan, the Soviet Ukraine, Sweden, and the U.S.–unspool over the course of five days and nights, each and every film accompanied by brilliant musicians from around the world and right here at home. Prominent this year among the movie marvels are a significant number of films boasting dazzling color palettes, piercing a longstanding myth about silent cinema's monochrome universe.

A nonprofit organization, SFSFF is committed to educating the public about silent-era cinema as a valuable historical and cultural record as well as an art form with enduring relevance. In a remarkably short time after the birth of moving pictures, filmmakers developed all the techniques that make cinema the powerful medium it is today– everything except for the ability to marry sound to the film print. Yet these films can be breathtakingly modern. They have influenced every subsequent generation of filmmakers and they continue to astonish and delight audiences a century after they were made. SFSFF also carries on silent cinema's live music tradition, hosting the world's foremost practitioners of live accompaniment.

In addition, SFSFF has long supported film preservation through the Silent Film Festival Preservation Fund, and, over time, has expanded our participation in major film restoration projects. This year we have partnered on the restoration of a feature by an American master making its premiere on Thursday evening.

Amid the films and music are many of the people who make all this possible. Archivists, researchers, preservation specialists, and authors come from around the world to share their knowledge of these silent-era gems–and to tease the revelations yet to come.

Enjoy the festival!

Buster Keaton in *Our Hospitality*

WEDNESDAY MAY 1

7:00 PM THE CAMERAMAN
Musical accompaniment by Timothy Brock conducting students of the San Francisco Conservatory of Music
SFSFF 2019 Award presentation to Cineteca di Bologna

THURSDAY MAY 2

10:00 AM AMAZING TALES FROM THE ARCHIVES
Guest Presenters: Robert Byrne and Thierry Lecointe, Stefan Drössler, Hisashi Okajima, and Bruce Goldstein
Musical accompaniment by Stephen Horne

1:15 PM WOLF SONG
Musical accompaniment by Philip Carli
Introduction by Mike Mashon

3:00 PM THE OYSTER PRINCESS
Musical accompaniment by Wayne Barker
Introduction by Joseph McBride

5:00 PM EARTH
Musical accompaniment by the Matti Bye Ensemble
Introduction by Anne Nesbet

7:00 PM THE SIGNAL TOWER
Musical accompaniment by Stephen Horne and Frank Bockius
Introduction by Kevin Brownlow

9:00 PM OPIUM
Musical accompaniment by Guenter Buchwald
Introduction by Stefan Drössler

FRIDAY MAY 3

10:00 AM YOU NEVER KNOW WOMEN
Musical accompaniment by Philip Carli
Introduction by William Wellman Jr.

12:00 NOON TONKA OF THE GALLOWS
Musical accompaniment by Stephen Horne
Introduction by Eddie Muller

FRIDAY MAY 3 *continued*

2:15 PM HUSBANDS AND LOVERS
Musical accompaniment by Philip Carli
Introduction by Heather Linville

5:00 PM RAPSODIA SATANICA
Musical accompaniment by the Mont Alto Motion Picture Orchestra
Introduction by Gian Luca Farinelli

7:10 PM THE LOVE OF JEANNE NEY
Musical accompaniment by the Guenter Buchwald Ensemble
Introduction by Jay Weissberg

9:20 PM WEST OF ZANZIBAR
Musical accompaniment by Stephen Horne and Frank Bockius
Introduction by Jesse Hawthorne Ficks

SATURDAY MAY 4

10:00 AM LIGHTS OF OLD BROADWAY
Musical accompaniment by Philip Carli
Introduction by Lara Gabrielle Fowler

12:00 NOON HELL BENT
With BROWNIE'S LITTLE VENUS
Musical accompaniment by Philip Carli
Introduction by Cassandra Wiltshire

2:30 PM GOONA GOONA
Musical accompaniment by Club Foot Gamelan
Introduction by Mike Mashon

4:30 PM L'HOMME DU LARGE
Musical accompaniment by Guenter Buchwald and Frank Bockius with narration by Paul McGann
Introduction by Serge Bromberg

6:30 PM THE WEDDING MARCH
Musical accompaniment by the Mont Alto Motion Picture Orchestra
Introduction by Andrea Kalas, Jeffrey McCarty, and Victoria Riskin

9:15 PM L'INFERNO
Musical accompaniment by the Matti Bye Ensemble with narration by Paul McGann
Introduction by Davide Pozzi

SUNDAY MAY 5

10:00 AM JAPANESE GIRLS AT THE HARBOR
Musical accompaniment by Guenter Buchwald and Sascha Jacobsen
Introduction by Hisashi Okajima

12:00 NOON THE HOME MAKER
Musical accompaniment by Stephen Horne
Introduction by Kevin Brownlow

2:15 PM SHIRAZ: A ROMANCE OF INDIA
Musical accompaniment by Utsav Lal

5:00 PM SIR ARNE'S TREASURE
Musical accompaniment by the Matti Bye Ensemble
Introduction by Barbro Osher

8:00 PM OUR HOSPITALITY
Musical accompaniment by the Mont Alto Motion Picture Orchestra
Introduction by Serge Bromberg

TABLE OF CONTENTS

FEATURES

PAGES

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PROGRAM ESSAYS

MUSICIANS AT THE FESTIVAL

WAYNE BARKER has garnered acclaim both for his original compositions and live performances in the theater, most notably a Tony nomination for best original score on *Peter and the Starcatcher*. His numerous credits include piano scores for Beth Henley's *Laugh*, an homage to silent-era slapstick, and Joe DiPietro's *Hollywood*, centered around the 1922 murder of director William Desmond Taylor.

Versatile jazz percussionist **FRANK BOCKIUS** specializes in jazz and is versed in medieval, flamenco, and Latin music styles. He has performed for dance and theater companies as well as in his own bands, the jazz quintet Whisper Hot and the percussion ensemble Timpanicks. As part of Guenter Buchwald's Silent Movie Music Company, he has performed for silent films at festivals in Kyoto, Pordenone, and Sodankylä, Finland.

As a specialist in orchestral music from the 1920s and 1930s, conductor and composer **TIMOTHY BROCK** has been responsible for the restoration of several landmark silent-era scores, including Dmitri Shostakovich's only silent score, *New Babylon*, and thirteen Charlie Chaplin-penned movie scores. A prolific composer as well, he has written original scores for silent films as varied as *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* and *Prix de Beauté*. (See an interview with Brock on page 10.)

Conductor, composer, pianist, and violinist **GUENTER BUCHWALD** is a pioneer of of the renaissance in silent film music. An in-demand composer and accompanist he has performed with a repertoire of more than three thousand silent-era titles and conducted orchestras worldwide from Iceland to Romania, Tokyo to Zurich. He is resident conductor of the Freiburg Philharmonic Orchestra for Silent Film in Concert.

Pianist and scholar **PHILIP CARLI** brings both a prodigious musical talent and a committed scholarly outlook to his silent-film accompaniments drawn from the music of the turn of the last century. He has played solo or with an orchestra at venues ranging from Lincoln Center to the Pordenone Silent Film Festival and is the staff accompanist for George Eastman Museum in Rochester, New York.

Musicians from the Balinese-style Gamelan Sekar Jaya join with members of Club Foot Orchestra to form **CLUB FOOT GAMELAN.** Founded in San Francisco in 1979, Sekar Jaya has been called "the finest Balinese gamelan outside of Indonesia" by the Jakarta-based *Tempo Magazine* and this year is under the direction of guest musician I Nyoman Windha, widely regarded as Bali's greatest living composer. The Bay Area-based Clubfoot Orchestra has composed and performed for silent films since the 1980s. They will play a score by Richard Marriott, who also conducts.

Based at London's BFI Southbank, **STEPHEN HORNE** is considered one of the leading silent film accompanists working today, and his music has met with acclaim worldwide. Principally a pianist, he often incorporates other instruments into his performances, sometimes playing them simultaneously. He has recorded music for DVD releases and television broadcasts of silent films and regularly performs internationally.

Bassist **SASCHA JACOBSEN** draws on a variety of musical styles from classical to jazz and Argentine Tango. He has played with a wide variety of performers from the Kronos Quartet to Rita Moreno and Randy Newman, as well as founding the Musical Art Quintet. He has done commissions for the San Jose Chamber Orchestra, Berkeley Youth Symphony, and San Francisco Arts Council, among others, and teaches at Bay Area schools.

Steinway's Young Artist of 2010, **UTSAV LAL** made his debut at the age of eighteen with his rendition of Indian ragas on the piano, stunning the world with his innovative handling of Hindustani classical music on a Western instrument. Often referred to as the "Raga Pianist," he has gained international recognition, performing everywhere from Ireland to Singapore, Germany to Kuwait, and beyond.

The **MATTI BYE ENSEMBLE** seeks that magical, emotional alchemy between music and images, playing a wide variety of instruments that include piano, glockenspiel, violin, musical saw, and percussion. It is led by award-winning film composer Matti Bye, who has been the Swedish Film Institute's resident silent-movie pianist since 1989. In addition to Bye, ensemble members include Helena Espvall, Kristian Holmgren, Lotta Johanson, and Laura Naukkarinen.

A chamber ensemble that revives the tradition of silent-film orchestras, **MONT ALTO MOTION PICTURE ORCHESTRA** has recorded and toured widely, creating vibrant, emotional, and historically appropriate scores for more than 125 films. The ensemble, consisting of Rodney Sauer, Britt Swenson, David Short, Brian Collins, and Dawn Kramer, combines precision playing with expert selections to bring silent cinema to life.

Over the past century the **SAN FRANCISCO CONSERVATORY OF MUSIC** has become a vibrant world-class conservatory helping musicians to achieve their best possible selves. Making their San Francisco Silent Film Festival debut, an ensemble of SFCM student musicians perform on opening night under conductor Timothy Brock.

Photo by Pamela Gentile taken at SFSFF 2014

Harry Gribbon and Buster Keaton

THE CAMERAMAN

MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT BY TIMOTHY BROCK CONDUCTING STUDENTS FROM THE SAN FRANCISCO CONSERVATORY OF MUSIC

DIRECTED BY EDWARD SEDGWICK, USA, 1928
CAST Buster Keaton, Marceline Day, Harold Goodwin, Sidney Bracey, Harry Gribbon, Edward Brophy, and Vernon Dent **PRODUCTION** Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer **PRINT SOURCE** Warner Bros.

You'd never know it, but *The Cameraman* was a bitch of a movie to make, being the first Buster Keaton made under his new contract at MGM, and the first with which he had to suffer the dumb know-nothing interference of a now-forgotten middleman producer (Lawrence Weingarten). MGM's head man, Irving Thalberg, liked it well enough, but the political structure of MGM, plus the coming of sound, sounded the death knell right at Keaton's peak. He survived the ensuing decades by making B-movies, shorts produced by an industrial film company, taking cameo bits and even a gig as a gag writer, in 1950, for the Red Skelton redo of *The Cameraman, Watch the Birdie*.

All of which can, if we let it, lend *The Cameraman* a sense of sadness and apprehension—how we all might wish for an ideal alternate cinema history, where Keaton had not reaped the mediocre box office that was often his fate, had not gone to MGM ("the biggest mistake of my career," he later said), was not sacrificed to the caprices of talkies (which, however, might've been inevitable, given Keaton's unique performative register), and did in fact thrive for decades, perhaps in the way Chaplin did, with infrequent but beloved passion projects that ferried his silent-clown persona into the new era.

Ah, well. The nimbus of fate that surrounds Keaton, making him a figure that Billy Wilder absolutely had to include in the cemetery lineup of *Sunset Boulevard*, is inseparable from the dazzling inventiveness and precise heroism of his best films, like the wistful disappointments of adulthood that give the memories of youth their golden hue. In any event, *The Cameraman* caps a small wedge of cinematic legacy we should always be thankful for: in a breathtaking five-year period (1923–1928, following his two-reeler apprentice stint with Fatty Arbuckle and Al St. John, and his first handful of solo shorts), Keaton masterminded eleven elaborate features and a dozen or so shorts, each of them still a gift to us in any time of great need. Maybe we could look at it that way: Buster *was* sacrificed, his career as an auteur essentially over by the time he was thirty-three, destined to play out the remainder of his decades in Hollywood as a grumpy ghost of the Way It Once Was, for the simple sake of a clutch of the most daring and graceful silent comedies ever made.

Keatonians will not blink at the hyperbole. *The Cameraman* may not be a tour de force in the manner of *Sherlock Jr.* or *The General*, but take care to appreciate its variegated charms and achievements, from the proto-Jackie Chan stunts clambering aboard the outside of moving vehicles, to the subtle (and, for Keaton, rare) explorations of contemporary social-sexual mores. Oddly, the metafictional possibilities of the film's primary setup—breaking into the nascent dog-eat-dog world of newsreel photography, that is, struggling to turn life into images in a manner that, in 1928, was newer to earthlings than the iPod—are only hesitantly explored.

Keaton's archetypal nebbish-hero is first seen as an itinerant tintype photog, hawking the old novelty on the sidewalk. That's soon subsumed with a crowd, and battling movie cameramen, rubbernecking over a visiting celebrity, who happened to be, in news footage, Gertrude Ederle, the first woman to swim

the English Channel. His eager transformation into a newsreel-man, in order to win the attention of the news firm's secretary, never allows for the representational slippage that bloomed in *Sherlock Jr.* where movies, dreams, and fantasies took turns masquerading as each other. Here, "reality" remains real as it's captured on film, in the spirit of the medium's first years—despite the hilarious fact that Keaton's scrambling go-getter never focuses or frames or even aims his lumbering tripod-borne camera, acting as a simulacra of dumb, haphazard human witness.

Or, the film's comically slipshod regard for cinematographic technology could be seen as Keaton's ironic swipe at the mainstream belief that seeing is in fact believing, and that reality could ever be captured at all. Maybe, but Keaton's comedy was always contingent on us seeing what remarkable thing did in fact happen, without cuts, and so the movie walks a fine and wiggly line between irony and literalism, allowing for racy detours (being accidentally naked in a public pool filled with women), familiarly Keatonesque set pieces (the repurposed crane shot up and down multiple staircases as Keaton bolts up and down), and even a springtime idyll, as Buster finds himself alone in an empty ballpark and pantomimes an entire home-run hit-and-dash for his own amusement, pretend-playing like the kid he always seemed to still be in some way. (This was shot, like other key scenes, in New York, at Yankee Stadium.) If you think about it, Keaton's art was always close to what movies are in their most basic molecular spirit, making believe, which is why we admire him even as we laugh, just as we'd be wowed in mid-play by our bravest and nimblest childhood friend doing with a blank face what we'd never dare.

Keaton examines the Vickers machine gun.

The Cameraman has a capaciousness to it, and a casual lack of urgency, that Keaton's other films don't—virtually anything, cinematographically-associated or not, could find its way into its narrative, even the last act's explosion of Yellow Menace racism, with our hero (now saddled, or blessed, with an organ grinder's monkey who handles some of the camerawork) suddenly in Chinatown, in the middle of an outrageous depiction of a Tong war. However inappropriate, it's a frantic action set-piece that blows the top of the movie's head off, as machine guns are matter-of-factly planted all over Mott Street (or the studio equivalent) and sheer crossfire mayhem ensues, giving Keaton's protagonist the opportunity of a scoop, even as his equipment is torn to bits by gunfire.

In the center of it all, there's Buster, implacable and modest and therefore heroic. Here's another way to think of Keaton's achievement, amid the noise and crazed showmanship and slovenly spectacle that is and was Hollywood: as a cinematic expression of *shibui*, the traditional Japanese principle of restraint and astringency. It's an aesthetic idea most often indexed in discussions of the filmic form of Ozu (and therefore Carl Dreyer, Robert Bresson, Hou Hsiao-hsien, Tsai Ming-liang, and other so-called minimalists), but it can also be seen as a matter of voice (in fiction, you could point to Hemingway's much-unsaid, leaning-out prose style as well), and, on film, a matter of presence, acting, reacting, personality. Keaton's famous on-screen affect resonates still because of how it requires us to watch actively, leaning in, empathizing with his hapless, dogged, guileless heroes because they do not in fact demand our attention or comradeship. Famously, there is no moment of nodding in our direction; rather, when Keaton looks into the camera, he's only gazing dumbfounded out into the abyss. He is alone, and self-reliant, and tireless. We cannot help him.

Which is the essence of dramatic entertainment as a form—ideally leaving us sequestered in our black-box theater, separate and watchful. The distance that's erased by a single Chaplinesque wink is crucial. Writing in 1969, theorist Stanley Cavell retells an old anecdote in which a Southern yokel instinctively jumps onto the stage during a performance of Othello in order to save Desdemona from the homicidal rage of a black man. Cavell doesn't even touch on the scenario's inherent racism. He instead looks at the man's reaction as the antithesis of what it means to partake of and participate in dramatic art. The yokel in question first doesn't understand the rules—the difference between reality and pretend—and second doesn't understand that there is no reason to act or interfere, because there is absolutely nothing a spectator can do to help either Desdemona or Othello. It is precisely our inability to alter the course of the story that guarantees our emotional investment and cathartic involvement. The yokel of the story didn't understand, in the end, that the feelings of alarm and empathy the play mustered were for him and him alone, and they were the reason for him to be there. We can care about Desdemona. But we will never be able to save her.

So it is with Keaton, whose searching visage is one of movies' deepest invitations into their capacity for human involvement. Because he asks so much, we tip forward, to try to occupy his hope and despair. He is our better angel.

— Michael Atkinson

SAN FRANCISCO CONSERVATORY OF MUSIC

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Emily Ji (Clarinet and bass clarinet)
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Bryce Leafman (Percussion)
Jason Kim (Piano)

KEEPING TIME WITH TIMOTHY BROCK

Interview by Thomas Gladysz

For more than thirty years, Timothy Brock has made a name for himself as one of the few composer-conductors who specialize in music for silent film. *Vogue* magazine has called him "the silent-film music guru."

In large part, Brock's musical life has focused on his own compositions as well as on concert works by early 20th-century artists. Brock has penned three symphonies, two operas, four concertos, six string quartets, and other orchestral pieces.

As a conductor, Brock endeavors to bring lesser known repertoire before the public, be it concert music or film music. His concert series of Entartete Musik ("degenerate music") by composers banned by the Third Reich introduced a number of significant pieces to the United States, including Hanns Eisler's music for the communist-themed film *Kuhle Wampe*. Brock has also restored landmark compositions such as Dmitri Shostakovich's only silent-film score, for *New Babylon* (1929), Erik Satie's Dadaist music for René Clair's *Entr'acte* (1924), and Camille Saint-Saëns's *L'Assassinat du Duc de Guise* (1908).

In 1986, at age twenty-three, Brock composed his first silent-film score, for G.W. Pabst's *Pandora's Box*, and has since written nearly thirty silent-film scores, most all commissions by orchestras and film institutions, from the National Orchestra of France to 20th Century Fox. Brock has composed scores for two other films starring Louise Brooks, *Diary of a Lost Girl* and *Prix de Beauté*, as well as for classics as varied as the Robert Flaherty documentary *Nanook of the North* and Fritz Lang's science-fiction epic *Woman in the Moon*.

Within the silent film community, Brock may be best known for his work on the films of Charlie Chaplin. Since 1999, he has served as score preservationist for the Chaplin family, having made thirteen live-performance scores and critical editions of all Chaplin's major films; each were based on Chaplin's own compositions. (In 2014 he conducted at SFSFF's celebration of the Tramp's centenary.)

As a composer, Brock holds Chaplin in high regard. "He was a gifted composer for melody but had a great sense of orchestral color, too. He was the perfect composer for his own films because he knew his characters inside and out, especially their vulnerabilities."

Brock has also done extensive work on the films of Buster Keaton, composing original scores for a handful of the comedian's short and feature films, including *One Week*, *Cops*, *Sherlock Jr.*, *College*, *The General*, and *Steamboat Bill Jr.* This year, Brock returns to the festival conducting his 2010 score for *The Cameraman*.

"What interests me is the way Keaton constructed his films, with a tremendous feeling for rhythm and atmosphere," Brock notes. "Chaplin was the same way. It's extremely musical. Perhaps it comes from them both being raised in the theater, I don't know, but one can set up a metronome with almost any scene and the action and emotions seem to line up precisely on cue every time."

For Brock, concert screenings of silent films are more than just an exercise in nostalgia. They are, rather, a deep dive into the films themselves. As a composer, Brock's silent-film music has a contemporary sound yet is rooted in the past. None of his scores contain anything musicians wouldn't have known at the time of the film's release. Similarly, as a conductor, Brock is an advocate of period performance practices. He regards pre-1930 standards—little or no amplification, for instance—as the level orchestras should strive for when performing this special type of repertoire.

DO YOU REMEMBER THE FIRST TIME YOU WATCHED A SILENT FILM AS AN AUDIENCE MEMBER?

I was ten. It was an all-day affair at the Granada Theatre in Seattle with film-organist Andy Crow. I think I watched the organist more than the film that day. But I remember two films: Keaton's *Cops* and Murnau's *Nosferatu*. It was *Nosferatu* that had the most impact on me because it was the first time that music genuinely frightened me. Yes, the images are frightening, but it was the music that really got inside of me. I remember covering my eyes during certain parts but it didn't help because I couldn't cover my ears as well.

WHAT CAN THE FESTIVAL AUDIENCE LOOK FORWARD TO IN YOUR SCORE FOR *THE CAMERAMAN*?

My score was commissioned by the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, which is why it only calls for seventeen players. But they are fully engaged as this film calls for a wide palette of actions: crowd scenes, boat races, fire-engine chases, love and love lost scenes, and a lot of pathos. There's even a Chinatown gang war. The challenge in any silent-film score is making all those elements seem like small parts of a whole musical idea, but not just by restating musical themes at appropriate moments. The composer tries to interweave the music within the film's imagery and not distract from it.

WHAT IS YOUR APPROACH IN COMPOSING FOR SILENT FILM?

Film research is a very large portion of what I do. It's important for me to know under what context the film was made, what would have been expected of the original composer if a score had already existed, and what the director's musical preferences might have been. I start by watching the film in its entirety two or three times in complete silence. On the second or third pass I may write down potential musical ideas. Then I start composing in earnest in short segments, about twenty to thirty seconds at a time. Some days I can compose up to three minutes of film in one day, some days it'll be fifteen seconds.

YOU'VE SAID CONDUCTING FOR SILENT FILM IS ITS OWN DISCIPLINE. WHAT DO YOU MEAN?

The only similarity between symphonic conducting and silent-film conducting is that both disciplines have an orchestra in front of you. If you've got a Mahler or Debussy score on your stand, the conductor answers to no one except the composer. Whereas silent-film conducting is an art form dominated by enveloping and mesmeric imagery whose tempos are relentlessly driven by a mechanical device in the back of the hall.

AMAZING TALES FROM THE ARCHIVES

WITH MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT BY STEPHEN HORNE

FLIPPING OVER EARLY CINEMA

A virtually unknown Parisian entrepreneur inadvertently saved a piece of early cinema with his small business making flipbooks from the films of the Gaumont company, Thomas Edison, and Georges Méliès. Restorer **ROBERT BYRNE** and researcher and historian **THIERRY LECOINTE** share the cinematic wonders found hidden away in this fin de siècle novelty and what it took to return them to the movie screen. (For more on this rediscovery, see page 14.)

WAITING TO EXPORT

Robert Reinert's *Opium* was one in a line of super-productions made in Germany at the tail end of World War I hoping to break open the international market once peace was finally declared. **STEFAN DRÖSSLER**, head of Filmmuseum München, talks about reconstructing *Opium* from the different negatives cut at the time, one for the domestic market, another for export, as well as the search for crucial nitrate fragments of the film's premiere version. Drössler also brings clips of another restoration project, the six-part film *Homunculus*, written by Reinert and the one that made his name. (For more on *Opium* see page 40.)

JUST THE RIGHT TENOR

In 1930 Nikkatsu debuted its Mina Talkie process by putting Japan's beloved opera star on film. Directed by the great Kenji Mizoguchi *Hometown* (*Furusato*) features Yoshie Fujiwara known as "Our Tenor." By the time the film was rediscovered in Tokyo some forty years later, the Mina Talkie system, like many others that emerged during the transition from silents, was all but forgotten. **HISASHI OKAJIMA**, director of the National Film Archive of Japan, talks about how they determined the film's proper frame rate and how it affects the pitch of Fujiwara's inimitable voice.

WHEN SILENTS GOT NO RESPECT

Director of repertory programming at New York's Film Forum and founder of Rialto Pictures, **BRUCE GOLDSTEIN** illustrates the time "When Silents Got No Respect"—parodied and ridiculed with facetious commentaries—as soon as talkies came in.

Fin de siècle flipbooks

Léon Beaulieu's Pocket Cinematograph

Lost films of Georges Méliès discovered in fin de siècle flipbooks

by Thierry Lecointe and Robert Byrne

From peep shows to gifs, moving images have proliferated as novelties inside and outside the movie theater since the invention of motion picture photography. In America, the most well-known of the early inventions is the Mutoscope, a single-viewer wooden cabinet that creates the illusion of movement with the crank of handle. But it was the simple and portable flipbook that put this illusion in the palm of a hand more than a century before the smartphone came along.

The earliest flipbooks pre-date motion pictures by nearly thirty years and books derived from motion pictures came hand-in-hand with the advent of projected films and examples were produced in the United States, England, Germany, Spain, and France as early as 1896. In France, the Lumières developed the Kinora, a viewer that cycled through bound images made from their films, while the Gaumont company used the traditional booklet form. However, recent research into Parisian manufacturer Léon Beaulieu has yielded some astonishing revelations.

Frenchman Léon Beaulieu manufactured his first flipbooks in late 1896, with his most productive period occurring late 1897 to early 1898. On March 9, 1898, he registered a patent for a "mechanical stripper," a simple device for browsing what he called "pocket cinematographs." Over his brief years of operation (1896–1901), his business was fairly itinerant (to say the least). Addresses printed on his flipbooks and confirmed in Parisian business directories name five different business locations in as many years. The last address, 257, rue Saint-Denis in Paris, was his location on February 22, 1901, at the time of his death at age forty-three.

Only bare traces of documentation exist to provide what little is known of Beaulieu's life. He had brown hair, gray eyes, and stood just over five-feet tall but, physical characteristics aside, his truculent personality is what stands out as his most defining feature. His 1880 induction papers for military service at age twenty indicate that he had already lost both parents. He could read and write but only attained a primary level of education. While in the military, he was imprisoned for two years for "insults and threats to a superior outside the service" and was denied a certificate of good conduct when he entered the reserves in 1885.

He later served another two months for assault, followed by two years in prison for fraud, and then two more months for another assault. In August 1896, the army discharged him because of asthma and obesity. The final entry in his penal record shows that on January 29, 1901, just weeks before his death, he was fined a hundred francs for an unspecified morals misdemeanor.

Independent researcher Thierry Lecointe first came across Beaulieu and his flipbooks in July 2013. A German collector had launched a crowdsourcing project hoping to identify an incomplete flipbook that he thought might depict Georges Méliès 1896 film, *The Arrival of a Train at Vincennes Station*. Though no conclusions were drawn at the time, Lecointe took up the hunt with the conviction that the book's images provided sufficient evidence (such as the inscription on the engine, locomotive and wagon markings, and the angle of the shadows) to accurately identify the station and the producer of the original film. Ultimately, he reached the conclusion that the book was very likely derived from frames of Georges Méliès's *Arrival of a Train at Joinville* (Méliès catalog number 35). Lecointe then came to the tantalizing realization that there could be others out there.

Lecointe's search led him to the French collector and historian Pascal Fouché, whose collection of more than ten thousand flipbooks (catalogued at flipbook.info) includes a corpus of twenty-four flipbooks manufactured by Beaulieu which, based on exhaustive research, is considered to be complete.

Of the twenty-four Beaulieu books in Fouché's collection, two use sequences of well-known films by Edison and Gaumont but others are from films no longer thought to exist. All the books in his collection appropriate images from motion picture films produced 1896–1897. Through a meticulous comparison of décor and other compositional elements in extant films, Lecointe has definitively attributed seven fragments from the films of Georges Méliès and thirteen others that possibly originate from Méliès films but cannot be identified with absolute certainty.

While most flipbooks came in a consistent format, Beaulieu published his books in a variety of dimensions and in lengths that ranged from 32 to 121 folios. By disassembling one of the books, Lecointe determined how Beaulieu manufactured his. He printed images side by side using a halftone photoengraving technique (similar to newspaper photography printing) and then cut the individual pages and bound them into the small finished books of varying sizes (11x11, 7x12, 9x10, etc.).

Since October 2017, Lecointe and moving image restorer Byrne have collaborated with Pascal Fouché to reanimate these delicate treasures. Photographer Onno Petersen devised an innovative mount that allowed each page to be photographed without risk to the pages or their fragile binding. In the final tally, some 2,346 photograms have been photographed, allowing glimpses of some of the very earliest motion pictures to complete their long journey back to the movie screen.

A Sampling of Flipbook Films

***Miss de Vère* (*Gigue Anglaise*)** Attributed to George Méliès, Star Film catalog no. 45 (1896). No film copies known to survive.

***Arrivée d'un Train* (*Gare de Joinville*)** Attributed to George Méliès, Star Film catalog no. 35 (1896).

David Devant Attributed to George Méliès, Star Film catalog no. 101 (1897).

Une Nuit Terrible Possible alternate version. Positively attributed to George Méliès, Star Film catalog no. 26 (1896).

Moulin Rouge: Quadrille Positively attributed to Gaumont, catalog no. 3 (1896).

CINEMA REDISCOVERED, ITALIAN STYLE

INTERVIEW BY MARILYN FERDINAND

Summer nights in Bologna provide wonderful opportunities to watch the Bolognese enjoy their *passeggiata* or join them in this traditional evening stroll on the historic piazzas that dot the city. For nine days in June, however, the Piazza Maggiore at Bologna's very center offers a different kind of *al fresco* experience. Hundreds of chairs are set up to face a large screen for an enthusiastic group of scholars, filmmakers, critics, and film fans who are there to see the gems that await them during the latest edition of Il Cinema Ritrovato, a festival of recovered, rediscovered, and restored moving pictures from around world.

The thirty-three-year-old festival, which takes place on the piazza and in other venues around Bologna, is the brainchild of Cineteca di Bologna, one of the most valuable centers for film preservation and restoration in the world. The festival, which has grown over the years (screening a staggering five hundred titles in 2018) mirrors the expansion of the Cineteca from its origins in 1963 as a city agency, to an autonomous entity in 1995, and, finally, a foundation, the Fondazione Cineteca di Bologna, in 2012.

The multifaceted institution engages in publishing and education and boasts an extensive series of archives. Its film archive currently houses about eighteen-thousand films from the silent era through the 1990s, and it preserves an audiovisual archive of VHS tapes, DVDs, film soundtracks, and radio and vinyl recordings. Its archive also contains film-related documents like screenplays, correspondence, lobby cards, posters, and publicity stills. Its library collection has close to twenty-five-thousand film-related volumes, books of photography, and graphic arts and comics publications, as well as about eleven-hundred magazine titles.

Most important, the contributions of its cutting-edge restoration laboratory, L'Immagine Ritrovata, are incalculable. Famously, the Cineteca has been entrusted with the restoration of more than eighty films—the entire body of work—of Charles Chaplin. Its recent issuing of the *DIVE!* box set, with films starring silent-era actresses Lyda Borelli and Francesca Bertini, is the culmination of decades of research and physical restoration, and an overdue tribute to the contributions of women to Italian culture.

This year, the Cineteca brings several restorations to SFSFF, including 1917's *Rapsodia Satanica,* starring the primordial Italian diva Borelli, and 1911's *L'Inferno*, the first full-length film in Italian history. The festival's opening night feature, *The Cameraman*, beautifully showcases Cineteca's latest undertaking and gift to silent filmdom—restoration of the complete works of Buster Keaton and a fitting complement to its Chaplin project.

Cineteca di Bologna director Gian Luca Farinelli, accepting the 2019 San Francisco Silent Film Festival Award on behalf of the Italian archive, talks about Keaton, *dive*, and the art of film restoration.

HOW IS KEATON IMPORTANT TO THE ITALIAN PEOPLE?

Back when we had only one TV channel in Italy, Buster Keaton's films were often aired, and this made him extremely popular. While Charlie Chaplin was the embodiment of classic cinema, Buster Keaton, from the explosive year 1968 on, became the face of a revolution, an example of avant-garde modernity. Silent cinema had many protagonists, but Buster Keaton, thanks to the beauty and almost graphic shape of his figure and face, is one of the few we all remember.

Gian Luca Farinelli

CAN YOU DESCRIBE THE CINETECA'S ROLE IN RESTORING THE ITALIAN FILMS AT THE FESTIVAL?

Working on *L'Inferno* was relatively easy: the important part of the work was collecting the different prints available. I have had the chance to work on restorations projects since 1990, and I must say that Nino Oxilia's *Rapsodia Satanica* holds a very special place. I need to start by saying that diva films are the result of a great artistic collaboration and have much stronger connections with painting, theater, and plastic arts than with cinema as we know it. *Rapsodia* is probably the highest point of this kind of experimentation. It is the work of a poet-filmmaker, an incredibly talented actress, and one of the most important Italian music composers of the 20th century. In the only existing print of *Rapsodia*, a black-and-white print held by Cineteca Italiana in Milan, one could immediately see the refined details of the intertitles, the mise-en-scène, the art of acting. But it was also evident that something was missing. In 1996, while I was at the Cinémathèque Suisse, I was handed a nitrate print of *Rapsodia*. Just looking at the reel, I could see how it was absolutely unique, with so much color on it. When we put it on the spool, we saw that it featured all the color systems known at the time—imbibition, tinting, stencil—and these incredible colors held together and enriched all the extraordinary characteristics of the film.

We did try an analog restoration of the colors. It was a very good work, but the results didn't come close to the richness of colors we saw on the nitrate print. Then, digital technologies came along, and we could try again; we came very close to that sumptuous color system *Rapsodia* had. There was also very complicated work regarding the score. Pietro Mascagni's score can be considered as the first great work composed by a maestro of Italian music especially for cinema. We know that he asked to modify some of the film scenes in order for the music to work better. Unfortunately, the original orchestral score was lost. It was reconstructed by Timothy Brock based on the piano scores, which were still available.

THE PRE-WWI TRAVELOGUES HAVE BEEN SUCH A REVELATION. WHY DID THESE FILMS LANGUISH FOR SO LONG, AND WHAT HAS MADE RESTORATION OF THESE WORKS POSSIBLE?

The films we collected in what we call our Grand Tour selection have been unknown for many years. The reason for this is quite simple: these are short films without a named director and often with no reliable dating. They seem to be closer to the 19th century than to the 20th century. They show us pre-Fascist Italy, an archaic country where cows roam freely on the Via Appia and people in Sicily salute the arrival of the very first train. Thanks to the work of archives all over the world, these films by unknown directors could be saved, and together with them, the memory of our past has been saved, too.

Edoardo Scarfoglio and Matilde Serao

Parla una spettatrice

In which the author addresses Italy's poets, novelists, and playwrights distressed by the lowbrow fare at the movies.

by Matilde Serao

I don't deny that the novelist and writer named above—myself—has, with her companions in the very same toil, often vigorously discussed potentially remarkable and beautiful but utterly forgotten stories from the names that live on in literary history; stories which for the most part flash across the reality of the cinema like an immense rocket on a summer night, momentarily lighting the firmament only to leave behind a denser darkness and the stink of burned gun powder ...

Then, for months and months, and with a feeling of sincere humility, I did only one thing: I went to the movies to take up my role of *spettatrice*. With my mortal eyes, I went to see, for a few cents, or even less, whatever might please, amuse, or move me in a film show. I sat in a corner, in the dark, silent and still, like all my neighbors; and my anonymous and unknown persona because like many others, anonymous and unknown, who were sitting in front of, behind, or beside me. I was like them, an ordinary spectator, without preconceptions, without prejudices, without any sort of bond to anything or anybody. I did not have any ideas or opinions, nothing of anything crammed my mind, which because pure and childlike, spending so little money, staying in that darkness, in that silent and stationary anticipation. And do you know what happened? I experienced the very same impressions felt by my neighbor on my right, who was, I suppose, a shop assistant; the same ones felt by my neighbor on my left, who, now urbanized, has formerly been, I think, a little provincial. And when the lady sitting in front of me laughed, I laughed too because in the dark everybody was laughing; and if the lady behind me cried, I started crying like her and like all the others who were doing the same.

And so, I became a perfect *spettatrice*, by going from show to show, watching all those stories on the white screen, startling at a sudden appearance or threatening danger, a-throb with the anguish for the heroes of an unknown drama, or with the mortal risk run by a sweet character, destined to die. This *spettatrice* became convinced of a truth—let us say, an eternal truth—that the audience of the cinematography is made of thousands of simple souls, who were either like that in the first place or made simple by the movies themselves. For one of the most bizarre miracles occurring inside a movie theater is that everyone becomes part of one single spirit. This common spirit gets bored with, or angry at the characters' entanglements, the intricate episodes, the written and often fleeting intertitles, which force it into extremely rapid mental effort. In addition, it is impressionable and tender, sensitive to the real and sincere affections; honorable and right—perversity and meanness astonish, yet outrage it. Attracted, but not deceived by the exterior beauty of actors and actresses, it is disappointed if their acts and faces reveal no interior life. Plain but highly sentimental forces like love and pain can deeply affect such an innocent thing.

Oh, poets, novelists, playwrights, and brothers of mine, we should not strive so anxiously and painfully for rare and precious scenarios for our films! Let's just go to the truth of things and to people's naturalness. Let's just tell plain good stories, enriching our craft from life itself and take on that elusive but passionate aura of poetry, which springs from our overflowing heart. Stories in which every man and woman would be human, in the widest or humblest meaning of the world; stories in which tragic, dramatic, ironic, or grotesque performances would merge in that unlikely harmony of human events. Dearest friends, it is a *spettatrice* speaking to you, a *spettatrice* who now asks herself, in retrospect, the reasons for her tears, her smiles, her boredom. This woman who is speaking to you is a creature of the crowd, it is she whom you should move, who you should please ...

An excerpt from "Parla una spettatrice," which first appeared in the June 15, 1916, issue of *L'Arte Muta*. Translated into English by Giorgio Bertellini and published in *Red Velvet Seat: Women's Writing on the First Fifty Years of Cinema*, edited by Antonia Lant and Ingrid Periz.

About Matilde Serao

Author of more than forty novels and short stories, Matilde Serao wrote the first critique of the movies by an Italian intellectual, the title of her 1906 article, "Cinematografeide!," playfully equating the craze for the novelty amusement to a contagious disease. She founded newspapers in both Rome and Naples—two with her husband Edoardo Scarfoglio—and her influence encompassed all of Italy. Serao championed Neapolitan cinema as a popular art, frequently contributing reviews to Gustavo Lombardo's film publication *L'Arte Muta* and writing scripts of her own. Her first scenario was realized by "Za La Mort" creator Emilio Ghione, but, as Anita Trivelli writes in her profile of Serao for the Women Film Pioneers Project, no trace of this or her other scripts is known to survive. Influential, prolific, principled, and beloved, Serao was vocally anti-Fascist and her nomination for the Nobel Prize in Literature, supported by her colleagues, was passed over four times by the time she died in 1927. To this day, Naples's legendary gathering spot Caffè Gambrinus serves a cone-shaped pastry filled with cream and wild strawberries created in her honor, called La Matilda.

WOLF SONG

MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT BY PHILIP CARLI

DIRECTED BY VICTOR FLEMING, USA, 1929
CAST Gary Cooper, Lupe Velez, Louis Wolheim, Constantine Romanoff, Michael Vavitch, Ann Brody, and Russ Columbo **PRODUCTION** Paramount Famous Lasky Corp. **PRINT SOURCE** Library of Congress

"A gorgeous portrayal of the lives and loves of big outdoorsmen and big-eyed senoritas in the days when a beaver's pelt was the people's currency." That's how Paramount promoted Victor Fleming's *Wolf Song* in 1929—and for once there was truth in advertising. Fleming based his shoot at the just-opened June Lake Lodge in Mono County, California, where spring-fed lakes and snow-capped mountains provide majestic backdrops. He built lived-in recreations of Taos, New Mexico, and Bent's Fort, Colorado, circa 1940, at the two-year-old Paramount Ranch in Calabasas. (The Woolsey Fire incinerated the Ranch's longstanding "Western Town.")

Fleming created a male persona towering enough to match the Sierra Nevada from a star who hadn't yet hit his stride: Gary Cooper. He brought out the smolder beneath the sizzle of the exciting young Lupe Velez (barely out of her teens). Surrounding Cooper as mountain man Sam Lash and Velez as Taos belle Lola Salazar with supporting players like that great broken-nosed character actor Louis Wolheim, Fleming fashioned a romance that revived a piece of Southwest history while drilling into a frontiersman's warring appetites for love and freedom.

Fleming had established himself as Paramount's most versatile director with credits ranging from two hit Zane Grey oaters, which he made by the seat of his pants—carrying the novels in his pockets—to his smash comic adaptation of Sinclair Lewis's *Mantrap* (1926), an artistic breakthrough for Clara Bow. The studio promoted him as a "genius" and handed him a prestige product in Harvey Fergusson's 1927 novel about a wandering Kentuckian who finds his identity as a fur trapper then loses himself to the romantic jewel of Taos's Mexican ruling class.

Fergusson, a protégé of H.L. Mencken, was an ambitious son of New Mexico with a modern erotic awareness and a granular instinct for lives that encapsulate American contradictions. His inspiration for *Wolf Song* was legendary mountain man Lucien B. Maxwell, who continued trapping and scouting years after he married Mexican heiress Luz Beaubein, then settled down to become perhaps the biggest landowner on the continent. That history informs Sam and Lola's battle of the sexes, waged over a matter of weeks in Taos, Bent's Fort, and the wilderness. John Farrow's final screenplay boiled down the story to twelve sequences. In the editing, Fleming wagered that even less plot and more intimate byplay would help him imbue scenes of lovers circling and torturing each other with the tension conventional views of the Old Southwest gave only to brawls and duels.

The movie interlaces vigorous action and memories as if to prove Zora Neale Hurston's adage, "The present was an egg laid by the past that had the future inside its shell." Fleming introduces us to Cooper's "tall silent boy" and sidekicks Rube Thatcher (Constantine Romanoff) and Gullion (Wolheim) as they head for Taos, their mules packed with fur. We learn that Sam is wildcat-nip for the ladies. In one flashback, Sam races out of Kentucky to escape a shotgun wedding. In another, at a St. Louis saloon, Gullion and Thatcher fight over a girl while Sam spirits her into a backroom—which impresses the older guys and seals the three of them as friends.

Lupe Velez and Gary Cooper. Photo courtesy of the Library of Congress

SAM IS WILDCAT-NIP FOR THE LADIES.

Taos comes into focus as a feudal society ruled by wealthy Spanish families known to the mountain men as *ricos*. The elite's sons gamble on cockfights—feathers fly over huddled bettors' heads—while elders punish a peasant couple rolling in the hay. Lola privately questions the lusty female and gnaws her knuckles in excitement when she says her bruises come from love bites. Lola may be the daughter of a don, but she aches to be swept off her feet. When the rugged gringos scream out their arrival, townsmen wrest their women out of view, but Lola sets her sights on Sam.

Costume designer Edith Head recalled that Fleming "wanted Lupe to be so sexy that most of the time her bosom would be hanging out. I went to Mr. Fleming and said, 'Don't you think that's a little inconsistent? Women did not uncover their bosoms in those days.' He told me, 'Edith, if no woman had ever shown her bosom in those days, you wouldn't be here.'" Velez had been her director's lover and she soon became Cooper's, on and off set. Who could resist? When Sam shaves and bathes in a hot spring to "slick up" for the town ball, Fleming frames him low on his waist, to show that he's not wearing anything. The sun reflects on the water and glints off his tall, lean, sinewy frame. "Ain't you the pretty white thing," says Thatcher. "If one of those Mexican gals gets aholt of you, she'll *never* let you go."

Cooper had ambled into movies as a stunt rider. Playing a cowboy, he stole *The Winning of Barbara Worth* (1926) from its stars, Vilma Banky and Ronald Colman, then did two quickie westerns before his attention-getting bit in William Wellman's *Wings* (1927). As a fatalistic air cadet, he nibbled a chocolate bar, announced, "Luck or no luck, when your time comes you're going to get it," then sauntered out of his tent—and crashed. Imposingly lanky, with a long, thin face and features whose impassivity intensified any inkling of thought or emotion, Cooper already had a torrid liaison with the camera. All he needed to hold down a major role was a talented director and a multidimensional script: he got both in *Wolf Song*.

As Sam he exudes an elemental ardor. At the Taos ball, Sam proclaims, "I WANT A GAL TO DANCE WITH ME" and Lola arrives just in time. Cooper and Velez lock into each other's eyes as Sam and Lola embrace on the dance floor and he leads her to an empty terrace. He elopes with Lola under fire and marries her at Bent's Fort, rousing the wrath of her father and the astonishment of his pals. But the film's ultimate contest is waged inside his heart, between marital bonds and the call of the wild. Sam leaves Lola to hunt and trap again, but he can't get her out of his system. Memories deny him sleep. Images of her wash through his brain and across the screen in an audacious montage done in lingering dissolves. Fleming delivers the erotic coup de grace when he superimposes Lola's body crushing against Sam's and a spectral, elongated hand caressing the side of his face. The guy can't take it. He heads back to his wife, only to be wounded in an Indian ambush. His painful trek to Taos takes on the feeling of a sexual mortification. Whatever Lola wants, Lola gets, but at significant cost. Here, as in *Red Dust* and *Gone with the Wind*, Fleming proves himself a master of romantic ambivalence. Fleming and his cast are adult enough to mix ecstasy with anguish, and romantic victory with personal defeat. Sam is not the same man at the end, and if he's more open and vulnerable, he's also scarred and weakened.

Paramount released the movie as a silent and as a part-*singing* movie (which appears to be lost). The studio didn't clear the rights to use Fergusson's words for spoken dialogue but did pay publisher Alfred A. Knopf $750 to interpolate some songs.

Gary Cooper. Photo courtesy of the Library of Congress

A male choir harmonized on a "Wolf Song" chorus; Cooper warbled "My Honey, Fare Thee Well"; and Velez trilled, among others, "Yo Te Amo Means I Love You," the movie's theme song. Pop baritone Russ Columbo, another of Velez's lovers, appeared as Lola's effeminate *rico* suitor (a character right out of the book) and presumably crooned Latin love ditties. There were three to five original numbers (written by top composers like Richard Whiting and Harry Warren) and eleven musical interludes in all. Contemporary reviewers complained that Velez "repeats a sentimental air whenever a guitar is handy" and "the characters break into song at any old time."

It might be fun to see Cooper perform as perhaps the first singing cowboy and definitely the first singing mountain man; it might also dilute the tenebrous lyricism at the movie's core. *Wolf Song* boosted Cooper's career and remains hot and haunting today. Fleming soon guided Cooper to perfect his signature, understated style in *The Virginian* (1929), but this film captures him at an unusual peak of intensity.

As Sam, Cooper upsets the brotherhood of the traveling buckskin pants and embodies the existential schizophrenia of someone torn between untrammeled liberty and marrow-deep marital love.

— Michael Sragow

THE OYSTER PRINCESS

MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT BY WAYNE BARKER

DIRECTED BY ERNST LUBITSCH, GERMANY, 1919
CAST Ossi Oswalda, Victor Janson, Harry Liedtke, Julius Falkenstein, and Kurt Bois **PRODUCTION** Projektions-AG Union (PAGU) **PRINT SOURCE** Murnau-Stiftung

It took a Mexican filmmaker at the Oscars to remind Americans that one of the most essential creators of its national cinema is an immigrant named Ernst Lubitsch. Parent to both the American movie musical and the rom-com, the brilliant twins that sustained the Hollywood film industry in its lean years and made it shine in its golden ones, Lubitsch plied his dual gifts for comedy and elegance into a subtle art that rightly bore his name—the "Lubitsch touch." But long before there was any *Trouble in Paradise* or a *Design for Living*, before Garbo laughed or Jeannette MacDonald sang, Lubitsch was in his home country forging a remarkable first career.

A Russian Jew by heritage Lubitsch was born in Berlin and by age nineteen seems to have been a contender for hardest working actor in showbiz, playing supporting roles at Max Reinhardt's groundbreaking theater in the evenings and then mugging it up on the city's bawdy nighttime stages into the wee hours. He started appearing in movies in 1913, "daylighting" at the studio, playing typical young male characters borrowed from Yiddish theater, like the perennially titillated ladies' footwear salesman in 1914's *Shoe Palace Pinkus*, which he also directed. Once he had taken the helm, as he did earlier that year for a lost film with the promising title *Miss Soapsuds*, he'd found his true calling, gave up the theater—and began to work even harder. A visitor to the set of his 1921 ancient-Egypt spectacle *The Loves of Pharaoh*, perhaps overcome by the atmosphere, likened him to a dervish, because "[h]e can whirl through more work in a day than most directors can get past in a week."

Of all his years in movies, German or American, 1919 might have seen Lubitsch at his most productively frenetic, whirling around about eleven films, seven released that year and three more in the works for 1920. While most of his 1919 releases were shorter comedies (running about forty minutes to just over an hour), two Lubitsch features also premiered, including the anomalous *Rausch*, an adaptation of a Strindberg drama starring Asta Nielsen. Three of the comedies featured his discovery, the mop-headed cherub with the mischievous center Ossi Oswaldi who had made her film debut in a supporting role in Lubitsch's *Shoe Palace Pinkus*. In 1919's films she takes the lead—*My Wife, the Movie Star* (presumed lost and, by the title, unbearably so), *The Doll*, and, of course, *The Oyster Princess* (*Die Austernprinzessin*). Loosely based on the Leo Fall farcical operetta *The Dollar Princess*, it is the one Lubitsch regarded as his first to spin satire from slapstick.

As *Oyster Princess*'s ripe American brat, Oswalda seems to channel a pubescent Veruca Salt just learning how to weaponize her estrogen. We first meet her smashing vases in her palatial quarters already in ruins from a tantrum brought on after reading that the Shoe-Polish heiress has become betrothed to a count. No trinket or stick of furniture is safe until her indulgent bulk of a father, the Oyster King (Victor Janson), promises to deliver a prince. Meanwhile, Prince Nucki (the sweetly handsome Harry Liedtke) is living the opposite of large in a one-room garret reduced to washing his own underthings.

Continental noblemen might be a bargain but even an impoverished royal has standards, so, after a visit from the matchmaker with an Old World proposal from the nouveau riche, Nucki sends his longtime

Ossi Oswalda. Photo courtesy of Murnau-Stiftung

valet Josef (Julius Falkenstein) to vet the prospective bride in his stead. Once inside the Oyster Princess's kingdom, Josef is mistaken for the potential groom and the plot is set into kinetic motion. It's improbable in the extreme but serves the ongoing joke about Europeans' skeptical view of American can-do-ness. Besides, it's hard to fuss over improbabilities as we're giddily led along from one hilarious set piece to the next.

Armies of maids fitted with uniforms coded to their task (velvet bustiers for the bathers; satin bloomers for driers) tend to Ossi's toilette where she doesn't lift a finger. Meanwhile the valet is made to wait endlessly for an audience and he begins tracing the geometrical pattern in the parquet with his feet, until he's practically doing a dance in the king-sized parlor all alone—a neat parallel with the infectious foxtrot of legions to come. When he summons servants to find out what's taking so long, they instantly materialize in an obliging V-shape queue. The lavish wedding seems to also instantly materialize, with the ersatz couple off to take their vows in a carriage pulled by eight unnecessary horses and eight equally superfluous riders. An elaborate dinner follows, served by three hundred straight-backed waiters arranged in rows of absurdly redundant ranks.

There's meaning behind all the metronomic madness, with Lubitsch mocking the martial nature of aristocracy (recently downgraded with the collapse of the German and Hapsburg empires) as well as overfed Americans and deprived Germans, freshly minted stereotypes from the new postwar reality. He even takes a gentle swipe at American racism in the form of four poker-faced body-men of African descent who attend to the Oyster King's every single need, including the lighting of his preposterously rotund cigars and the administering of infinitesimal sips of coffee. Overindulging at the wedding feast is Josef, standing in for the poor deprived German finally getting a decent meal. His debauchery—he hasn't had the upper-class's practice—also serves to delay wedding night consummation (as does Ossi's strong will), a plot necessity that forever absolves any complicity in the ridiculously prolonged case of mistaken identity. Throughout the film, whenever plot machinations threaten to snatch our suspended disbelief down from its airy heights, delight buoys it right back up into the clouds.

Julius Falkenstein and Ossi Oswalda. Photo courtesy of Murnau-Stiftung

To Germans, it must have seemed a balm. The film did so well that extra prints had to be struck to meet exhibitor demand—no small thing as competition was fierce among scores of films hitting the theaters that year to take advantage of a gap in the country's censorship laws and in hopes of being the "one" to break German productions back into the international market. Critics complained a bit about the comedy's "American elements" and cast-of-hundreds silliness. But most quickly conceded, like *Lichtbild-Bühne*'s reviewer, that "the direction of Ernst Lubitsch here is at such a fabulous height, one idea chases the next so brilliantly that one actually forgets the qui pro quo of the so-called plot." *Film-Kurier*'s critic believed it matched the worthiness of any super-production hoping to appeal abroad and wrote: "Whether an idea is strong or weak does not matter in a Lubitsch comedy. Here it is the 'how' not the 'what,'" concluding quite correctly, "It will fill the seats of many cinemas for many weeks. Satis est."

By now Lubitsch had a cast of regulars that included Hanson, Liedtke, Falkenstein, and, of course, Oswalda, rightly beloved as the German Mary Pickford, but with an appeal more raunchy than sweet. Lubitsch's behind-the-camera collaborators, also fundamental no doubt to his impressive output that year, included production designer Kurt Richter, who had repurposed German Expressionism's horror-house aesthetics for playhouse whimsy in Lubitsch's *The Doll* earlier in the year; his regular cameraman Theodor Sparkühl, who later helped put the noir in American film noir; and longtime colleague and friend Hanns Kräly, with writing credits through Lubitsch's last American silent.

The final film of Lubitsch's to get a 1919 release, *Madame Dubarry*, was the movie that opened America's door to German films postwar. A major undertaking, *Madame Dubarry* is set on the eve of the French Revolution and features Lubitsch's dark-haired muse Pola Negri as Louis XV's doomed coquette. It required another century's castles and ball gowns and furniture, as well as throngs of extras, this time writhing for bread and justice, not merriment. A smash at home, *Dubarry* also got the attention of the actual American Sweetheart, Mary Pickford, who summoned Lubitsch to Hollywood to help her shed her girlish image. The industrious Lubitsch made several other comedies and historical spectacles before he left Germany for good to write a new chapter in film history—the seeds for his groundbreaking musicals and sophisticated comedies that earned him the immortality recalled by Alfonso Cuarón one hundred years later already sown in the playfully fertile ground of *The Oyster Princess*.

— Shari Kizirian

Based on ideas from the author's "Ernst Lubitsch's First Career" previously published by Fandor's now defunct Keyframe blog.

1919

A DECADE ENDS AND AN AGE BEGINS.

4 JANUARY
Hundreds of thousands of Berliners take to the streets in support of police chief Emil Eichhorn fired for refusing to use force to quash demonstrations in the wake of World War I. Rightwing mercenaries known as the Freikorps respond and the fray results in hundreds of deaths. On January 15, Freikorps abduct, torture, and kill activists Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, tossing Luxemburg's body into the Landwehr Canal where it lies frozen in the ice until the end of May. Sometime this month, Fritz Lang drives to the studio through the rioting to direct his first feature, *Habblut*.

16 JANUARY
In Boston a faulty tank of molasses ruptures, sending an eight-foot wave of viscous brown liquid down Commercial Street at an estimated thirty-five miles per hour, killing twenty-one people. The president of Brazil dies from Spanish flu, a pandemic that had infected one-third of the world's population.

18 JANUARY
Paris Peace Conference opens.

19 JANUARY
Sinn Fein holds its first congress in Dublin and declares independence from the Crown. Meanwhile rogue members of the IRA shoot two Royal constables dead, spurring an Irish poet to write the lines: "And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,/ Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?"

31 JANUARY
The Battle of George Square erupts in Glasgow when police club workers striking for a forty-hour work week. The British military occupies the streets until mid-February.

3 FEBRUARY
Carl Th. Dreyer's first film as director premieres in Stockholm. *The President* is about an upright judge in a small town who comes face to face with his own dubious past.

5 FEBRUARY
Mary Pickford, Douglas Fairbanks, Charlie Chaplin, and D.W. Griffith become the first artists to own a major studio. Later in the year, United Artists releases Griffith's *Broken Blossoms* and Fairbanks's *His Majesty, the American*.

The 369th Infantry Regiment Band

19 FEBRUARY
New York City welcomes home the Harlem Hellfighters with a parade. The all-black infantry that served under French commanders in WWI is led by James Reese Europe's regiment band, playing a lively music that blends marches with blues and ragtime.

20 FEBRUARY
Oscar Micheaux's first film *The Homesteader*, about a lone black farmer in rural South Dakota, premieres at Chicago's Eighth Regiment Armory accompanied by the Bryon Bros. Orchestra. It marks the film debut of Evelyn Preer who remains Micheaux's leading lady through 1927.

26 FEBRUARY
Grand Canyon becomes a national park by an act of Congress.

1 MARCH
The March First Movement to end the Japanese occupation fills Pagoda Park in Seoul. Koreans are inspired by Woodrow Wilson's February speech outlining the Fourteen Points that include the right to self-determination. Japan responds with violence. Seven days later, massive strikes paralyze Egypt after Britain exiles the leader of its independence movement, Saad Zaghlul, and by mid-summer eight-hundred Egyptians are killed.

2 MARCH
The Comintern is founded by Vladimir Lenin to spread Communism.

15 MARCH
The *New York Times* reports that short-sleeves from Paris are a good thing and a colorful smock under a woman's waistcoat is "no longer merely a Greenwich Village eccentricity ... It allows the freedom which she craves and she may be wise enough to cling to it."

23 MARCH
Benito Mussolini founds the *Fasci di Combattimento* paramilitary group in Milan.

5 APRIL
The Polish Army then fighting both the Russians and Ukrainians executes thirty-five Jewish residents of Pinsk who were meeting to discuss distribution of Red Cross aid. The commander later claims they were Bolsheviks.

6 APRIL
On Chowpatty Beach, forty-year-old lawyer Mahatma Gandhi, who had helped recruit his countrymen for Britain's war effort, calls for widespread peaceful noncooperation in response to the Rowlatt Act, by which the British Raj could hold its subjects without charge for two years. A week later troops massacre one thousand at a Sikh festival in Amritsar.

10 APRIL
Mexican revolutionary leader Emiliano Zapata, who sought to end landowners' stranglehold on the country's wealth, is killed in an ambush.

12 APRIL
The French serial killer nicknamed "Bluebeard" for seducing widows in order to steal their assets is arrested. Henri Désiré Landru dismembered the bodies of ten women and one teenage boy and burned them in his kitchen oven. Police can only charge him with embezzlement until his private ledger tracking his aliases is uncovered a few years later.

25 APRIL
J'Accuse, Abel Gance's antiwar epic, which drew on soldiers' letters home for its intertitles, is released in Paris. Walter Gropius releases his Bauhaus manifesto calling for craftsmen and artists to overcome their historical divisions and unite to build a new world.

1919 timeline continues on page 44

EARTH

MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT BY THE MATTI BYE ENSEMBLE

DIRECTED BY ALEXANDER DOVZHENKO, UkrSSR, 1930
CAST Semen Svashenko, Stepan Shkurat, Yuliya Solntseva, Elena Maksimova, Mykola Nademskyi, Petro Masokha, Ivan Franko, and Vasyl Krasenko **PRODUCTION** All-Ukrainian Photo Cinema Administration (VUFKU) **PRINT SOURCE** Oleksandr Dovzhenko National Centre

Oxford scholar Yuval Noah Harari popularized the idea that humans did not domesticate wheat, but rather, the grain tamed us. In his 2015 book *Sapiens*, he notes that wheat required back-breaking labor to plant and collect. Yet because it allowed for accumulation, evolutionary forces persuaded its cultivators to settle next to it, soldier on—and multiply their pain. The Agricultural Revolution, he argues, enclosed humans in unhappy homes while the humble, once-regional wheat seed spread across the globe and roamed free.

Wheat is a central character in Alexander Dovzhenko's 1930 silent, *Earth*, and, as blowing stalks sway over acres and into the horizon in this marvel, appears just as wily a master as Harari describes it.

Unpredictable, like the planet it's named for, Dovzhenko's *Earth* (*Zemlya*) burns a number of arresting images into our retinas about human-nature interaction—including the iconic female face matched with a sunflower's wide openness against the big sky. There are brilliant juxtapositions, like the elderly man savoring one final, fulsome bite of apple* before reclining to his death on a bed of composting fruit. There's physical humor: Sunburned and grease-smeared farming men urinate into a tractor's radiator to resolve its overheating (as no water can be found). There's the raw power of bodies: a pack of we-don't-know-whose muscled horses stare into the distance regally, curiously; and a naked woman in a state of pure rage thrashes in an empty bedroom. There is surreal magic as our protagonist, an otherwise pragmatic young man introducing machine efficiency and cooperative ownership to the community, begins a fantastically lit solo folkdance through town that grows more zealous step by step.

If the collective farm story for the early Soviet state is anchored by simplicity—a poor peasant and local Communist youth leader attempts to reallocate land to the people with the help of a tractor brought in from HQ—*Earth* untethers itself with a series of whimsical directorial choices. One loopy sequence projects into the farm's future, where the abundant wheat is happily harvested by smiling faces and milled with the help of choreographed machines then formed into delicious loaves that roll off the assembly line and onto bakers' shelves. At other moments, Dovzhenko's characters focus their gazes out of frame—but viewers are never given an image that shows what they might be looking at. At still others, characters' lips move at length but no speech is reported in intertitles. Are these a result of cuts and compromises? Or by directorial design as scholar Elizabeth A. Papazian argues in "Offscreen Dreams and Collective Synthesis in Dovzhenko's *Earth*," her 2003 article in *The Russian Review*.

Dovzhenko is certainly at full potency as a director when he unleashes powerful passions in the sui generis twelve-minute cross-cut funereal finale, where the wails, cries, and whimpers of the angry priest, the mourning wife, the birthing mother, the farm-collective eulogizers, and the mind-blown murderer all compete for our sympathies. It's the atheist new order versus religion, political change versus (or as) the cycle of life, personal pain versus collective enlightenment. Which one wins?

Poster by Georgii and Vladimir Stenberg

"THERE IS A MAD LOGIC TO ITS IMAGERY."

"There is mad logic to its imagery," wrote Judy Bloch for the Pacific Film Archive in 1992. The program for the National Film Theatre in London in 1991 noted the film's "pantheistic phosphorescence." That *Earth* was—and is—on the edge stylistically, critics agree. Its intent is another story.

As a piece of cinema, *Earth* was the result of a fairly autonomous Ukrainian film production scene that reached its apex in the years 1927–1930, according to Ivan Kozlenko, director of the Oleksandr Dovzhenko National Centre, before being dismantled and united with Soviet production. It was a filmmaking world influenced by regional currents and international pulses: the Ukraine's own "romantic *vitaism*," as well as Expressionism, Constructivism, and the avant-garde. In those final three years, the quality of Ukraine's film unit (VUFKU) peaked, according to Kozlenko, producing Dziga Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera*, Nikolai Shpikovsky's *Bread*, as well as the second in Dovzhenko's Ukraine trilogy, *Arsenal*, about a factory uprising (the first, *Zvenyhora*, covered two thousand years of Ukrainian history), and, of course, *Earth*.

They were cinematically productive times but tragically complicated ones that historians are still sorting through today. Joseph Stalin's first Five Year Plan was being initiated and the collectivization of farms in the Soviet Ukraine led to protest and mass starvation. The deaths of millions of Ukrainians under Stalin's reign in a man-made famine—the Holodomor—wasn't spoken of openly in the USSR until the glasnost era.

Was *Earth* supporting the Soviet Union's efforts? Censors didn't think so. Released on April 8, 1930, *Earth* was banned nine days later, and dismissed by Soviet authorities with labels of "biologism" and "naturalism." Papazian states that early reception of the film praised its formal mastery but found ideological failures for emphasizing natural processes over political change. She notes that one detractor at the time, "Kremlin poet," called it a "counter-revolutionary obscenity!" and "a Kulak cinema-film." It was only embraced by the Soviet Union two years after Dovzhenko's death, in 1958, and that same year was named by European critics as one of the twelve most important films in world cinema.

By the 1990s, a different interpretation took hold: critics argued the film used biological life cycles and flora-fauna imagery not to resist but to support and naturalize the idea of changes in social structure, that is, collectivizing farms. On the body of a fallen hero, a movement grows.

As Kozlenko wrote for the Pordenone Silent Film Festival in 2013: "Dovzhenko is probably the most prominent and the most controversial personality in Ukrainian Soviet culture ... He developed his own philosophical system, a political and cultural project of Ukraine far removed from dogmatic Communism ... he embraced Futurism and traditionalism, utopianism and conservatism."

He contained multitudes. As does *Earth*. From this juncture, it's not synthesis, but dissonance that propels the film from its moment ninety years ago to our very present day. Papazian argues that all of those characters looking elsewhere—not at the camera, not at us, but off-screen, into the distance—are looking toward a utopia, the hopeful promise of the future in a very troubled present. Those of us from the newly troubled present are gazing out at visions of a better future as well, wondering if any such thing will ever arrive.

It's easy to laugh at one of the film's most earnest lines, during the eulogy for Vasyl, who died for bringing a tractor to his people. The orator speaks of how his glory will "fly all around the world," like, he says, "that Communist airplane of ours up there!" He points. The camera follows the faces looking upward in unison, then up at the sky, but doesn't find the airplane itself at all. Was it really there? Cut to moist, resplendent apples on trees. Is it all part of Dovzhenko's brilliant plan?

"One does not want Dovzhenko to be advocating collectivization," writes Papazian, "which in Ukraine became a synonym for genocide; one would prefer *Earth* to resist a plan that was going so wildly awry just as the film was being released in the Soviet Union and internationally." But perhaps he was actually doing that, and—importantly, she suggests—more. "Instead of resisting the Soviet utopian ethos," she writes, "Dovzhenko's film resists interpretation."

Whether you find it opaque or transparent, believe it promoted USSR policy or was a paean to his people and their traditional way of life, *Earth* is, in the year 2019, a wonder to watch. Its animals, humans, and plants—including wheat, that staple that's subjugated our species—burst off the screen. In the same way that a mountain range is geographic evidence of the mighty moving plates always at play underneath us, Dovzhenko's *Earth* is a physical record of cultures in collision—a monument, any way you look at it.

* Though "pears" are mentioned in a film intertitle, the fruit eaten is actually apple. Dovzhenko had a deep fondness for apples in both their metaphorical and physical forms—even planting trees at the film studio where he worked.

— Susan Gerhard

Photos courtesy of the Oleksandr Dovzhenko National Centre

THE SIGNAL TOWER

MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT BY STEPHEN HORNE AND FRANK BOCKIUS

DIRECTED BY CLARENCE L. BROWN, USA, 1924
CAST Virginia Valli, Rockcliffe Fellowes, Wallace Beery, Dot Farley, Frankie Darro, James O. Barrows, and J. Farrell MacDonald **PRODUCTION** Universal-Jewel **PRINT SOURCE** SFSFF Collection

Universal Pictures was the sausage factory of Hollywood, churning out westerns and melodramas for rural audiences in the Midwest. But once in a while, they came out with a Special—they called them Universal-Jewels. Clarence Brown made three of the best, *Smouldering Fires*, *The Goose Woman*, and *The Signal Tower*.

The Signal Tower was a railroad drama made by a man who loved railroads. A former auto engineer and future director of Greta Garbo, Clarence Brown had been assistant to the great pictorialist, Maurice Tourneur, and he displays in this film a similar feeling for light, composition, and atmosphere. He had a stronger sense of drama than his mentor, and this story of a tower signalman and his family on a lonely mountain railroad is a model of rising dramatic intensity.

Joe Standish (Wallace Beery) is sent as relief man on the midnight shift and Dave Taylor (Rockcliffe Fellowes) takes him in as boarder, despite the misgivings of his wife, Sally (Virginia Valli). A storm breaks out, Standish becomes drunk and, taking advantage of Taylor's desperation as he deals with a runaway freight train, he makes advances to Taylor's wife ...

In her outstanding new biography of Clarence Brown, Gwenda Young writes: "Perhaps for the first time in his early career, Brown was genuinely fired up by the prospect of working with a beautiful cast—in this case of both the human and the locomotive variety. Growing up close to the railroad in Knoxville, Tennessee, Brown had a nostalgic affection for trains, while the engineer in him appreciated their efficiency and the sleekness and majesty of their design."

Young considers this also the first film by Brown in which "a complicated woman is put center stage." She goes on to explain how he enriched the story through character development: "his sensitive handling of Virginia Valli allowed her to transform the paper-thin character of [Wadsworth] Camp's story into a rounded protagonist that views Joe with both fear and desire. The cat and mouse game that slowly unfolds also gives Wallace Beery space to add layers of warmth, humor, and disturbing undertones to Camp's more unambiguous villain. In early scenes he spends most of his time with Sonny [Frankie Darro], charming him with magic tricks and winning him over with friendly attention, but even then the audience has niggling doubts as to his motives. And it soon becomes clear that this is part of Joe's campaign to possess everything David holds dear: his wife, his son, and his identity as the family patriarch."

Virginia Valli—real name McSweeney—was a former stenographer. Born in Chicago, she was a Ziegfeld graduate who won fame for her roles in Universal's *The Storm* (1922) and *A Lady of Quality* (1924). She played with Hope Hampton in one of the few films directed by actor John Gilbert, *Love's Penalty* (1922). She worked in England for Hitchcock in *The Pleasure Garden* (1925) and with Howard Hawks in *Paid to Love* (1927). She married Charles Farrell, who starred in *7th Heaven* (1927), and retired from the screen in 1931.

Virtually unknown and unseen these days, Rockcliffe Fellowes often played villains—lovable villains. Born in Canada, he was known as one of the wittiest men in Hollywood and acted in the films of two of the others, Marshall Neilan and Raoul Walsh. He debuted

in the movies as the lead in Walsh's 1915 gangster picture *Regeneration*.

Frankie Darro started in pictures at the age of six with *Judgment of the Storm* (1924) and had supporting roles in Clarence Brown's *Flesh and the Devil* (1926) and *Kiki* (1926). In 1925 he appeared in no less than ten pictures. He took the title role in *Little Mickey Grogan* in 1927 and played tough kids in talkies like *Public Enemy* (1931) and *Wild Boys of the Road* (1933). He ended his career doing stunt work and bit parts.

Wallace Beery began in circuses and became a Mack Sennett comedian, famous for being the first of Gloria Swanson's six husbands. He excelled at playing hateful Huns in World War I pictures. When he worked for Tourneur and Brown, he specialized in lovable slobs. While first-class in all his pictures, he proved himself a great actor in King Vidor's *The Champ* (1931), for which he won an Oscar.

Back in 1916, Clarence Brown had worked on a picture called *The Rail Rider* for Tourneur. He handled most of Tourneur's exteriors—which Tourneur disliked shooting—and that picture was nearly all exteriors, depicting how a locomotive crew battled through floodwaters. I have seen the one surviving reel and it is very promising. But while the film got wonderful reviews in its day, the rest of it is lost.

In 1965, Brown described to me how he made *The Signal Tower:* "We took over a railroad in northern California and worked among the big trees for six weeks. Ben Reynolds was my cameraman. [He had recently photographed *Greed* for von Stroheim.] We used to get up at 5 a.m. and shoot the locomotive climbing the gradient, with the sun coming up and the steam mingling with the trees. It was just beautiful. We made everything on location, even the interiors of the signal tower, which I had built at a switch track. When it got too bright outside we fitted amber glass in the windows to balance the exposure.

"The whole railroad was ours. They had one train a day. Once we let that through, it was our set. I had a terrific wreck in the picture, when the train broke loose at the top of the mountain and came down wide open."

The photograph of Gertie's boyfriend shown in the film is actually of Brown's resourceful assistant director, Charles Dorian, who had been with him since his first feature in 1919.

In a *Letter from Location* from *Picture-Play* magazine's May 1924 issue, Virginia Valli evokes the atmosphere up in Mendocino County well: "I guess I'm 'farthest North' as they say in books; just about as deep into the wilds of Northern California as any picture player has ever ventured. It's beautiful; great redwoods, the bluest sky I have ever seen and brown and yellow maple leaves lending a dash of color to the deep green of the firs. It's so beautiful it's actually awe-inspiring."

The intertitles are cleverly illustrated with a railroad signal. At key moments in the developing drama the signal moves from Safety to Warning and then Danger.

"*The Signal Tower* was the first of Brown's more personal films," writes Gwenda Young, "And just as Hitchcock was apt to do, Brown elected to step in front of the camera, appearing onscreen as the ineffectual switchman who fails to stop the runaway train (he also 'appears' as the unseen 'Conductor Brown,' the addressee of a telegram)."

Unusually for a Hollywood release, *The Signal Tower* had its world premiere in London. Normally, the British got their American films a year late. *Variety* reported, "it was a particularly fine example of the American genius for taking an ordinary story, with scarcely a new angle in its triangle theme, and building the thin fabric without losing interest until a crashing sensation sends the audience out to talk of the new kinematographic wonder. The author has made romance out of the somewhat sombre lives of what, in England, is somewhat snobbishly called 'the working class.' An English producer would be almost shocked if asked to find romance in the life of a traction engine driver. He can only find beauty or heroism in the higher ranks of life."

Frankie Darro and Rockcliffe Fellowes. Photo courtesy of the Kevin Brownlow Collection

No 35mm copy of *The Signal Tower* is known to survive and the film has been restored from an original copy made for Universal's Show-at-Home library. We owe the survival of that print to the late Eric Sparks, an English enthusiast for both railroads and silent film, who had the sense to buy such rare titles when they first appeared on 16mm.

Photoplay magazine chose the film as one of the six best of the month for August 1924: "This tale might easily be trite melodrama. In the hands of Director Clarence Brown, it becomes a compelling story … The director has touched upon the home life of a young towerman and his wife with keen insight." *Moving Picture World* might have done something for the film's box office chances by claiming that Clara Bow was in it.

Remember that the film was made during Prohibition, so the liquid that drains from Joe Standish's suitcase would have represented a tragic loss!

— Kevin Brownlow

ABOUT THE RESTORATION

Only two 16mm copies of *The Signal Tower* survive: a tinted copy created in 1928 in the collection of Kevin Brownlow and Patrick Stanbury's Photoplay Productions and a preservation duplicate of a 16mm copy at the Packard Humanities Institute. These two sources were scanned at 4K resolution then digitally repaired in accordance with the ethicial guidelines of the International Federation of Film Archives (FIAF). Then, two new 35mm black-and-white negatives were made, and from those, two new 35mm prints, which were then dye-tinted by specialist chemists in Prague to identically reproduce the colors of the original dye-tinted 16mm source.

— Robert Byrne

Letter from Location

Northspur, Mendocino County, California

Part of a regular series in *Picture-Play*, this letter addressed to magazine correspondent Myrtle Gebhart was published in its May 1924 issue.

Dear Myrtle:

Well, I guess I'm "farthest North," as they say in books; just about as deep into the wilds of Northern California as any picture player has ever ventured. It's beautiful; great redwoods, the bluest sky I have ever seen and brown and yellow maple leaves lending a dash of color to the deep green of the firs. It's so beautiful it's actually awe-inspiring.

You'll see all this when THE SIGNAL TOWER is released. We have put in three weeks up here on a little stream called the Noyo River; three weeks filled with fun, a little excitement—and even a little tragedy.

I'm playing a placid housewife with a small son and a hard-working railroad-man husband—Rockcliffe Fellowes plays that part, with Frankie Darro as the little boy. Wallace Beery plays the "other man," and Clarence Brown is the director. Mrs. Brown [Ona Wilson] came up with us—and that makes it nice; a sort of feminine point of contact with a director in a camp where the lack of many conveniences and little refinements might pave the way to many little misunderstandings ordinarily.

But we're just a great big family up here. We all sit around after supper with all sorts of little pastimes that would sound foolish back in Hollywood—a sort of short-and-simple-annals-of-the-poor existence, as it were.

A few days ago I had a little time off and explored the country. There was an old abandoned estate; once a beautiful place, and it seems from countryside legend that the owner wandered off one day after breakfast and never came back. Left a charming house, beautifully furnished, stables, dairy, and all. The natives are rather reticent about it. We passed two evenings speculating on it and inventing romances to fit the strange happening.

Wallace Beery suggested that maybe the man was disappointed in love and went to Mexico or Canada or some place like that to drown his sorrow. Or else he might have fallen over a cliff, like a serial star. Mr. Brown said that maybe the poor man was blackmailed and fled. Dot Farley thought maybe he was an Eastern criminal who came out into the great open places to try and go straight—and then found out that a detective was on his trail. We all wondered. We've never been able to get the inside information on it. Charlie Dorian, the assistant director, said that maybe the daughter won a beauty contest—and the family moved to Hollywood to get into pictures!

We had an awful lot of excitement when a hand car was wrecked and Wallace Beery and Charlie Dorian were hurt. Poor Charlie was quite seriously injured. He'll walk with a cane for months. Mr. Beery got off very easily. When the rest of the company picked them up he felt himself all over. I was rubbing his head and Dot Farley holding his hand. Then he grinned. "Gosh, if we only had the publicity man here to tell me where I'm hurt," he said.

The little country hotel we stay at isn't bad at all—except that the principal article of diet is steak. They're always out of everything else and steak is the old stand-by. Mr. Beery says he's going to be ashamed to look a cow in the eye when he gets back to Hollywood. But he has a good appetite, even if he does kick about the steak. The other day he complained that he was so tired of steak he'd lost his appetite. "Lost your appetite, have you?" asked Mr. Brown. "I saw the steak you had for breakfast—and if they'd left horns on it they could have milked it!"

I met a most interesting character here, a man who has hidden himself away in the woods, with only dogs for companions. Several of us had dinner in his camp—he cooked and served everything and wouldn't allow anyone to help. It wouldn't be fair to mention his name, as he is really very famous here and on the Continent. I held my breath while he told of the wonderful places he'd been: Port Said, Hongkong, Guatemala, queer unheard-of islands on the Pacific Ocean, names I can't even pronounce. He's studying nature, he says, and he certainly knows wonderful things about plants, birds and animals.

The children of the ranchers are awfully interested—and interesting. They crowd around and watch us whenever we come into the hotel, and once in a while one will pick up the courage to come to us and ask questions. They wanted to know what the reflectors were for, and how the camera worked, and whether we liked it in Fort Bragg, and what not. I grew to be awfully fond of one little girl. Strangely enough, no mothers appeared to try and get their children into the movies. They haven't reached that lamentable stage up here in the country and still think more of sending their children to school than capitalizing them in front of a camera.

I ought to be back in a week or so—I'll phone you the minute I get in, and we'll have luncheon together and I'll tell you lots more.

Virginia Valli

OPIUM

MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT BY GUENTER BUCHWALD

DIRECTED BY ROBERT REINERT, GERMANY, 1919
CAST Eduard von Winterstein, Sybill Morel, Werner Krauss, Conrad Veidt, Hanna Ralph, Friedrich Kühne, and Alexander Delbosq **PRODUCTION** Monumental Filmwerke **PRINT SOURCE** Filmmuseum München

In 1920, Conrad Veidt and Werner Krauss costarred in German Expressionism's *film clef*, *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari.* Its stylized, distorted sets and sinister plot twists summed up for many the postwar dread after the German defeat in World War I. The Weimar Republic that administered a tenuous democracy between 1919 and 1933 had to contend with serious shortages: seven hundred thousand Germans died of hunger in the postwar period, with hyperinflation between 1921 and 1923 rendering their currency nearly worthless. A misery both psychological and actual permeated this hectic period that has been characterized as "dancing on the lip of a volcano."

However, many Weimar-era films were not Expressionist in style at all. Just a few months before *Caligari*, Veidt and Krauss played supporting roles in the big-budget melodrama *Opium*. Its acting was more florid than stylized. Its sets, rather than modernistic, hark back to the German romanticism of the 18th and 19th centuries, with its veneration of nature and fascination with exotic lands. Its remarkable deep-focus cinematography floods the frame with character, action, and atmosphere. Made after the censorship board had been abolished at the end of the war, it features not only scenes of drug-induced debauchery and (implied) adultery, but also bucolic interludes with bare-breasted nymphs.

Opium's Professor Gesellius (Eduard von Winterstein) has been studying the narcotic's effects in China and makes the quixotic decision to sample the drug himself on the eve of returning home to England. The evil Nung-Tschang (Werner Krauss) lures him with the pipe: "Smoke! You will experience no pain, no hunger, no boredom, no despair!"—a particularly appealing temptation to its postwar audience. In short order, Gesellius rescues a young girl, piquantly named Sin (Sybill Morel) from Nung-Tschang's clutches. He takes her home where he is in charge of a sanitarium for recovering opium addicts. His wife (Hanna Ralph, as expressive as any Italian diva) is suspicious of the young girl, whom Gesellius employs as a nurse. But her own actions during Gesellius's absence—an affair of the heart with his tall, handsome young assistant Dr. Richard Armstrong Jr. (Conrad Veidt)—were not entirely pure.

Shot in Berlin and Munich, *Opium* presents a romanticized, Germanic version of China, India, and even of England. The story begins in an imaginative, exotic China, a crowded marketplace populated with dozens of vendors and buyers haggling over silks and trinkets. The China sets include a rock-walled rose garden hung about with paper lanterns, a pagoda-topped palanquin, and the sinister opium den of Nung-Tschang. It's opulently decorated with embroidered hangings, furnished with carved teak furniture, and populated by beautiful women twirling parasols in incense-scented air billowing from huge bronze censers. Even Professor Gesellius's laboratory is decorated with Chinese wood carvings, and he's attended by his mysterious turbaned Indian servant (Alexander Delbosq). Unexpectedly, the first opium stupor that Gesellius experiences here is not tinted and toned in garish or exotic colors, but is rather sweetly bucolic, taking place in a pastel-hued lakeside where nymphs with flowered wreaths entwined in their hair frolic with handsome satyrs. The den itself is more feverish than the dream.

Eduard von Winterstein (left). Photo courtesy of Filmmuseum München

Even more exotic and lavish is India, where Gesellius escapes complications at home by accepting a convenient government grant to study opium usage there. The first shot of India features five elephants parading through a huge ceremonial archway, followed by dozens of horses racing through elaborate sets of city streets, it seems, just for the hell of it.

The Indian opium den is brighter and more open than the Chinese one, with dancing girls in harem outfits. Gesellius is still sampling the drug he condemns, and his drugged dreams are still pastoral and rather pre-Raphaelite, though with a greater role for the devilish Pan figures, now riding goats. The English settings, by contrast, are expansive, and while much less cluttered than the Eastern scenes, no less impressive. Nature is continually glimpsed through the house's large windows. Clean white furniture decorates the sanitarium, set against a huge lake surrounded by trees, without another building in sight. In nature (as well as drugs) one can find oblivion, a title tells us.

The photography in *Opium* is the work of Reinert's frequent collaborator Helmar Lerski, who creates masterpieces of deep focus that were highly unusual for the time. Over and over, shots reveal foreground, middle ground, and background long before Orson Welles and Greg Toland, who are often credited with pioneering deep focus. A justly famed shot shows Gesellius speaking to an enormous university class from a lectern where he places a glass of water: the water stays in focus, as does Gesellius and his audience. The idyllic beauty of the English lake setting is a backdrop to the writhing patients and their ministering nurses at the sanitarium. The densely-populated Indian orgies are remarkable for their clarity, juxtaposed with gauzy narcotized hallucinations superimposed with Gesellius's Freudian fears. But for Lerski, finally, depth and crispness was all.

Krauss and Veidt acted in fifteen movies together in the silent era. Several are considered lost, including Richard Oswald's *The Diary of a Lost Woman*, made the year before. After all those years working together, their lives took entirely different paths. Conrad Veidt tried his luck in Hollywood in the late 1920s, where he created the memorable title character in Tod Browning's *The Man Who Laughs*. When talkies came in his German accent sent him back home where he starred in more than a dozen films until the Nazis took control of the country, and increasingly the film industry. Veidt, in the company of his new Jewish wife, then left again for good. He appeared in three films in England for Michael Powell then spent the rest of his career in Los Angeles, making his most lasting mark as Major Strasser in 1942's *Casablanca*. A principled anti-Nazi, Veidt knew his accent and features would typecast him as German in Hollywood, so he inserted a clause in his contract that all such roles be villains. As for Werner Krauss, he remained in Germany and became a dedicated supporter of the Nazi regime, earning the title Staatsschauspieler, or State Actor, in 1934. When the war ended, he was only allowed to resume his stage and film career after passing through a de-Nazification process.

Opium's director, the prolific Robert Reinert, is hardly known today. He directed more than thirty films between 1915 and 1925, yet he was, in the words of film archivist and historian Jon-Christopher Horak, "forgotten before his time." Horak points out that most of Reinert's movies were directed before *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* and he was therefore left out of two seminal texts on Weimar-era cinema, written by Lotte Eisner and Siegfried Kracauer, respectively. After early success as a novelist, Reinert worked with *Pandora's Box* playwright Frank Wedekind in cabaret. In 1915, he began writing scripts, making his name the following year with the enormously successful six-part film series *Homunculus*, which Horak says reveals Reinert's penchant for "'big themes' and metaphorical content." He was subsequently named artistic director of Deutsche-Bioscop, where he supervised the production of twenty films in 1917 and 1918 alone, none of which survive. His own *Nerven*, also from 1919, comes down to us in only an incomplete version. A big-budget project made at Reinert's own production company (Monumental), *Nerven* took him eighteen months to shoot and then failed at the box office. After *Opium*, he directed only three other titles, an ambitious and badly-received two-part recounting of the rise and fall of Western civilization, *Sterbende Volker* (1922), which no longer exists, and *The Last Four Seconds of Quidam Uhl* (1924), also lost. Reinert became a writer and producer at UFA in 1925, but Horak says his reputation as "an extravagant film budget buster" prevented him from directing again. He died in 1928, only fifty-six years old.

But he should be warmly remembered for the delirious *Opium* alone, something of an object lesson for us now, in a chaotic and dispiriting time when too many are again seeking refuge in opiate-induced oblivion.

— Meredith Brody

Left: Conrad Veidt, Eduard von Winterstein, and Sybill Morel. Above: Conrad Veidt and Hanna Ralph. Photos courtesy of Filmmuseum München

1919

A DECADE ENDS AND AN AGE BEGINS.

1 MAY

Adherents of immigrant and anarchist Luigi Galleani send boxes of dynamite disguised as packages from Gimbels to thirty-six government officials who support the U.S. Anarchist Exclusion Act of 1918. Most are intercepted but one explodes, blowing off the hands of a senator's housekeeper and injuring his wife. In Java, Indonesia, Mount Kelud erupts, expelling an entire lake of hot mud that spews out for twenty-fives miles killing five thousand people.

12 MAY

An exhausted Aurora Mardiganian makes her final appearance in Buffalo, NY, on a five-month roadshow for *Ravished Armenia* based on her first-hand account of the Armenian Genocide and in which she stars as herself. Several Armenian-American organizations express concern that Mardiganian, a teenager only recently escaped from Ottoman Turkey, is being exploited by do-gooders and seven impersonators take her place. She later successfully sues producers for uncollected income, which she uses to bring over a surviving sister.

15 MAY

Fearing a repeat of the atrocities carried out under the cover of WWI, the Greek Navy lands in Smyrna to protect the Greek population as the Ottoman Empire collapses. Violence erupts and three hundred Turks and one hundred Greeks are killed.

28 MAY

Different from the Others premieres in Berlin. Featuring Conrad Veidt in one of nineteen screen roles this year, the landmark film is written with Magnus Hirschfeld whose Institute of Sex Research officially opens in July primarily for the study of homosexuality and transgender identities but also provides birth control for women.

3 JUNE

The *New York Times* announces that drama critic Alexander Woollcott and Harold Ross (future founder of *The New Yorker*) have returned from the war. This same month, the first lunch of the Algonquin Round Table takes place and its members' barbed witticisms begin to circulate like Twitter memes. Many of its members will write for the movies.

Steelworker's strike in Gary, Indiana

4 JUNE

The U.S. Congress approves the 19th Amendment to the Constitution enfranchising women and sends it to the states for ratification.

28 JUNE

The Treaty of Versailles is signed in Paris. By November, four other major treaties are signed, mapping out new countries worldwide.

1 JULY

Responding to widespread lynching and violence against African Americans, Claude McKay's "If We Must Die" is published. It ends: "What though before us lies the open grave? / Like men we'll face the murderous, cowardly pack, / Pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back!" Poet Jessie Fauset becomes literary editor of the NAACP's influential magazine, *The Crisis*. Langston Hughes later calls Fauset "one of the midwives of the Harlem Renaissance."

22 JULY

Ballets Russes debuts its Spanish-themed ballet *The Three-Cornered Hat* with costumes and sets by Pablo Picasso. The renowned Cubist is among many artists to embrace classical forms of representation in what is called a "return to order"—an attempt to make the world whole again after the war.

27 JULY

Named for the blood spilled around the U.S. as racism overheated into violence, Red Summer had already claimed lives in Charleston, Washington, and Longview (Texas) when thirty-eight more are killed in Chicago during five straight days of shootings, stabbings, beatings, arson attacks, and looting. It begins on this Sunday after a white man causes a black teenager to drown in segregated waters and is not arrested. The deadliest episode takes place October 1 in Arkansas, when whites in Elaine become suspicious over black sharecroppers organizing and lynch an untold number of black citizens.

9 AUGUST

The Southern Syncopated Orchestra, led by Will Marion Cook and featuring an innovative clarinetist named Sidney Bechet, gives a private concert in the gardens of Buckingham Palace for George V and his family. Brought to London by impresario André Charlot, the orchestra tours the Continent for years. In October 1921, thirty-six members drown when the S.S. *Rowan* sinks off the coast of Ireland.

11 AUGUST

Germany adopts a new constitution, which guarantees women's suffrage, protections for foreigners and workers, free public school, and national healthcare. The Weimar era begins.

26 AUGUST

Union organizer Fannie Sellins intervenes when Allegheny Coal and Coke company guards beat a picketing miner. Deputies shoot Sellins four times, and one smashes in her skull with a cudgel then puts on her hat and dances. A coroner's jury later rules her death a justifiable homicide.

27 AUGUST

Russia nationalizes its film industry. As the Civil War rages on remaking parts of eastern Europe along the way, director Lev Kuleshov and cameraman Eduard Tisse film the Red Army in action and later combine the footage with acted scenes for 1920's *On the Red Front*. Josef Ermoliev and his troupe of filmmakers that includes actor Ivan Mosjoukine flee the Bolsheviks for Yalta, Odessa, Constantinople, and finally Paris where they will finish *The Harrowing Adventure* and set up shop in Montreuil, making the films that will reinvigorate French cinema.

1919 timeline continues on page 118

YOU NEVER KNOW WOMEN

MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT BY PHILIP CARLI

DIRECTED BY WILLIAM A. WELLMAN, USA, 1926
CAST Florence Vidor, Clive Brook, Lowell Sherman, El Brendel, Roy Stewart, Joe Bonomo, Irma Kornelia, Sidney Bracey, and Eugene Pallette **PRODUCTION** Famous Players-Lasky Corp. **PRINT SOURCE** Kino Lorber

You Never Know Women brings multiple gifts to lovers of silent film: the serene beauty of Florence Vidor ("the orchid lady of the screen"); two leading men, the handsome Clive Brook and the wryly sophisticated Lowell Sherman; character actors El Brendel and Eugene Pallette; performances from key vaudeville players of the 1920s; and highly cinematic direction by William A. Wellman.

The plot includes a love triangle, a Houdini-like underwater escape, a menaced virgin, a chase through a darkened theater, and a trained goose wearing a tiny top hat and glasses (it can roll over and play dead). There's also a modern twist to remind us that the issues behind "#metoo" have been around in women's lives—both on-screen and off—for a very long time. The original pressbook for the film describes it as "a love story of a lady with magic eyes," starring Florence Vidor, prominently billed above the title.

Florence Vidor was the first wife of the famous director, King Vidor, whose name she took and kept professionally. Wed in Texas in 1915, the two decided as a young couple to make their fortune in Hollywood. By the mid-1920s, she was a star in both comedy and drama, he was a celebrated director, and they were divorced, having separated in 1923. (She wed the famous violinist, Jascha Heifetz in 1929 and left movies.) Vidor is probably best known today for her role in Ernst Lubitsch's 1924 masterpiece, *The Marriage Circle*. Lubitsch loved her, calling her "the essence of refinement," but lest that should make her sound dull added that she was a "brunette with a blonde soul." She's soft and feminine, with thick hair, alabaster skin, clear eyes, a calm and ladylike exterior, but also with a real 20th century kick in her electric presence.

Vidor plays "Vera Janova," a headliner in "The Imperial Vaudeville of Russia." She's a fascinating character because she's both an old-fashioned fair maiden *and* a modern flapper. She's romantic, reads poetry, and dreams of a heroic Cinderella-style love. She also flies through the air on wires, has knives and spears thrown at her, and bravely balances on a narrow board held in the air by the wobbling feet of an acrobat. She's touring the United States (with no family member alongside her) and has a successful career with equal billing to her male partner.

Vidor is well-supported by two strong actors: Clive Brook and Lowell Sherman. Born in England, Brook exemplifies a reserved and ramrod-straight British matinee idol. Since he's playing a Russian magician, he's thus a bit of a *British* Russian magician, but he's still totally credible. He politely keeps out of the romantic life of the woman he loves, just doing his job throwing knives at her, until she needs him. His rival is played by Lowell Sherman, a born-in-a-trunk child of several generations of actors who was successful both as performer and director. (He guided Katharine Hepburn to her first Oscar in *Morning Glory* and helped make Mae West a star in *She Done Him Wrong*.) In *You Never Know Women*, he's a self-confident lecher who acts as if ruining young women was his personal privilege. When Vidor rejects him, he turns ugly, but once vanquished, resumes his smoothly mannered falsity. Donning his top hat, he bows, says "Good Night," and exits gracefully out the door.

Clive Brook. Photo courtesy of Photofest

"A LOVE STORY OF A LADY WITH MAGIC EYES"

El Brendel and Eugene Pallette were actors mainly defined by the sound era: Brendel with his Swedish impersonations and Pallette with his uniquely gravelly voice. The hefty Pallette will be instantly recognizable to fans of screwball comedy and classics like *The Adventures of Robin Hood*, even though, in 1926, he looks young and almost (not quite) slim. He's unbilled as a guest at a ritzy dinner party for which Sherman has hired Vidor's troupe to entertain. Pallette looks over the young women and callously asks Sherman to "pick out a little brunette for me—one that speaks English." El Brendel is a comic who sympathetically observes the latent love between Vidor and Brook. (He tells a fellow trouper, "You never know women, Dmitri.") An experienced vaudevillian working his first year in Hollywood movies, Brendel later became "America's Swede-heart," a character with a thick accent, limited intelligence, and plenty of "yumpin' yiminy" exclamations that today would land him in the office of the Swedish Defamation League!

The backstage story of *You Never Know Women* is, of course, not original. Over it inevitably hangs E.A. Dupont's 1925 German expressionistic story of theater life, *Variety*, starring Emil Jannings and Lya de Putti. But *You Never Know Women*, with a screenplay by Benjamin Glazer and Ernest Vajda, is deeply rooted in scenes of the "family" life of vaudeville performers as they banter backstage and live together in friendship. Their onstage routines invoke the reality of an actual vaudeville house in 1926. The bizarre creativity of these acrobats, dancers, jugglers, aerialists, and tumblers, not to mention the famous (in his day) "Frog Man Contortionist," is delightful history.

You Never Know Women confirms William Wellman as an early visual stylist. Wellman, known as "Wild Bill," was a flamboyant personality. He hung around Hollywood in a long apprenticeship that encompassed many areas of filmmaking: actor, stuntman, assistant director, prop man, etc. The great Wellman enthusiasts, Frank Thompson and John Gallagher, in their excellent book, *Nothing Sacred: The Cinema of William Wellman*, paint a colorful portrait: "He was a bully. He was a smartass. He was a poet. A ruffian. An artist. A brawler. A soft-hearted sap … a World War I fighter pilot in the Lafayette Flying Corps. He lived a life more adventurous, violent and unpredictable than anything he ever put on the screen." They say Wellman's movies "comprise an important body of work, deserving documentation for their important contributions to popular culture and the development of narrative cinema as art." Wellman's filmography includes *Public Enemy*, *Wild Boys of the Road*, *The Ox-Bow Incident*, the original *A Star Is Born*, *Battleground*, *The Story of G.I. Joe*, et al., as well as 1927's *Wings*, the first movie to win an Oscar for Best Picture. *You Never Know Women* confirms Thompson and Gallagher's thesis, as it demonstrates Wellman was thinking cinematically in the very earliest years of his career.

You Never Know Women is full of amazing stylistic flourishes: superimpositions, subjective POV shots, beautiful tinting, handheld camerawork, dramatic lighting, silhouettes, a moving and expressive camera, and more. A visual high point is a scene in which Brook walks Vidor out onto the stage for a surprise element in their routine. She's spectacularly dressed in a dark beaded gown, but as Brook presents her to the audience, the gown magically changes to a lighter color. She begins to glow, and her dress sprouts illuminated butterfly wings. Brook elevates her up into the rooftop of the theater where she flies round and round, looking down at the audience, seeing them looking back up at her. It's a lyrical and beautiful metaphor for his love for her, and for her own confident female presence.

Florence Vidor. Photo courtesy of Kino Lorber

The super-macho context of Wellman's life and personality have caused him to be measured by the yardstick of male storytelling. Manny Farber described his work as being about "heroic men sitting around doing nothing," but he also made good films built around strong women who definitely did something: Barbara Stanwyck in *Night Nurse*, Janet Gaynor in *A Star Is Born*, Anne Baxter in *Yellow Sky*, and the entire cast of *Westward the Women*, among others. *You Never Know Women* contains an early prototype. Vidor is falsely rescued by a man who later puts her in real danger (Sherman) as opposed to a man who puts her in false danger onstage, and then truly rescues her, but Vidor rescues herself by making her own decision about Sherman *before* she's endangered. Brook saves Vidor in the plot, in the old-fashioned manner, but she's nevertheless a woman who knows her own mind and who can and will fly if she wants to. *You Never Know Women* indeed.

— Jeanine Basinger

TONKA OF THE GALLOWS

MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT BY STEPHEN HORNE

DIRECTED BY KAREL ANTON, CZECHOSLOVAKIA, 1930
CAST Ita Rina, Josef Rovenský, Vera Baranovskaya, Jack Mylong-Münz, Antonie Nedošinká, Theodor Pištěk, Felix Kühne, Jan Sviták, Jindrich Plachta, Erno Košťál, and Rudolf Štěpán **PRODUCTION** Anton-Film
PRINT SOURCE Národní Filmový Archiv

The name Karl (Karel) Anton is unlikely to ring many bells, even for devoted cinephiles. Unlike his fellow Czech director Gustav Machatý, Anton's prolific output over three countries and five decades has watered down his reputation, not helped by the general unavailability of most of his features. For many years, when scholars even bothered to mention him, it was often as a footnote thanks to his contribution as uncredited associate director on the Nazi propaganda blockbuster *Ohm Krüger* (1941). He'd generally be described as a workmanlike director responsible for a potpourri of minor musicals in both France and Germany, with just a few touching on the fact that he directed the first Czech synchronized sound film, *Tonka Šibenice* (*Tonka of the Gallows*).

This changed once *Tonka* was restored just a few years ago, and audiences could finally appreciate the accolades accorded by contemporary reviewers: *Hebdo-Film* had called it "a powerful film of unusual dramatic force," while S. Victorien in *La Semaine à Paris* wrote of its "magnificent radiance," and the *Prager Tagblatt* wasn't alone in labeling Anton's ninth film "a masterpiece." What struck critics of the era finds equal resonance today, as *Tonka of the Gallows* is a deeply empathetic portrait of a prostitute whose self-contempt is equal to the scorn she receives from those around her. Magnificently played by the Slovenian star Ita Rina, fresh off her success in Machatý's *Erotikon*, the character of Tonka is yet another finely-drawn, complex portrait of a woman of the streets, of the type so movingly handled in a notable number of films of the late silent period. Viewing this drama now, we're drawn to make comparisons with the works of Murnau and Borzage, with their humanistic portraits of working-class struggles played out against a background of hardship and the jeering callousness of a jaded post-World War I society, made more oppressive with masterful shadows that trap and imprison like strips of blackened phantom fly paper.

The source material is leftist writer Egon Erwin Kisch's short novel *Die Himmelfahrt der Galgentoni*, first adapted for the stage in 1921 and starring the ill-fated actress Xena Longenová, noted for her portrayals of prostitutes and struggling members of Prague's lumpenproletariat (the role later became identified with Rosa Valetti, best remembered today as the blowsy older woman staring down Marlene Dietrich in *The Blue Angel*). When adapting the story for film, screenwriters Willy Haas and Benno Vigny made several changes, most notably eliminating the bookending device in which Tonka pleads her case before a heavenly court. Instead, the movie opens on a rickety train chugging through the countryside, with Tonka standing out in her citified clothes complete with the kind of scrubby feather boa that's a marker of her status as a lady of the night, especially when contrasted with the craggy-faced peasants beside her (the extras were recruited from the Moravian countryside around Veselí nad Moravou).

Tonka is temporarily escaping her sordid occupation in Prague for the purity of rural life and her loving mother, played by Vera Baranovskaya, star of Pudovkin's *Mother* four years earlier. Though we've yet to see Tonka plying her trade, we keenly sense

Ita Rina. Photo courtesy of Národní Filmový Archiv

the contrast between her two worlds, especially in a beautiful scene in which she opens a trunk in her old room and pulls out objects from her childhood: dolls, a mini-blackboard, and clothes. Standing at the window while undressing, her back to the camera, she's cleansed of impurities by the wholesome atmosphere, further emphasized by a montage of outdoor scenes showing village fêtes and livestock. Her mother hopes for a marriage between her daughter and Jan (Jack Mylong-Münz), but his importuning for her affections reminds her of her fallen status and the streetwalking clothes hidden away in a wicker basket; she returns to the city believing it's too late for an "honest" life.

Back in a dark, forbidding Prague, Tonka is found in a cheap brothel populated by a panoply of cynical whores presented by cameraman Eduard Hoesch's lurid pan across their jaded faces and crude body language. Plainclothes cops interrupt the usual transactions, seeking a volunteer to give succor to a convict on death row. The women are repelled by the idea, but Tonka, with nothing to lose and seeing an opportunity to offer sympathy to a fellow down-and-outer, accepts. (Jacques Vivien in *Le Petit Parisien* expressed amused surprise that the Czech justice system would grant condemned men such a wish: "Ours only offers them the traditional little glass of rum and a cigarette.") The prisoner (Josef Rovenský) is in a twisted rage, which she soothes with warmth and artless distractions such as a wind-up doll that transports them both to childhood innocence. Anton sets up a meaningful visual distinction between this pair, shot from slightly above, to the warden seen from below, the camera's contrasting angles turning the prison official into a figure of oppressive authority.

Tonka's mission of mercy becomes a source of taunts from her fellow sex workers, who brand her "the hanged man's widow." Unable to remain in the brothel, she ends up on the streets, the lowest rung on the ladder, where kindness is in ever short supply. Audiences of today trained to decry the punishments so often doled out to women who trespass social norms in movies of this era would do well to temper their analysis by questioning where our sympathies lie: with a cruel and unforgiving society of hypocrites, or with Tonka, a figure whose goodness remains uncorrupted? While it's important to recognize the insidious ways film rebukes women existing outside a rigid sexual morality, we need to allow ourselves the emotional satisfaction of acknowledging our solidarity with a character so skillfully delineated and so affectingly portrayed.

Jack Mylong-Münz and Ita Rina
Photo courtesy of Národní Filmový Archiv

Tonka of the Gallows was conceived in three versions: Czech, French, and German, of which the French version is the most complete and the main source for the restoration. Much satisfaction

"KAREL ANTON HAS USED ALL THE MEANS OF EXPRESSION OFFERED BY CINEMATOGRAPHIC TECHNIQUES..."

was expressed at the time about the quality of the sound recording—in the French release, a song is heard as well as a prayer, on top of the synchronized score composed by Arnošt (Erno) Košťál using both original compositions and excerpts from "Hatikvah," Beethoven's "Egmont Overture," Siegfried's funeral music from *Götterdämmerung*, and some folk music. Unusually, the reviewer from the *Prager Tagblatt* astutely criticized these choices for not fitting with the tenor of the scenes but conceded, "these are teething problems." The rush to praise following the film's Czech release on February 27, 1930, was swift and near unanimous, though one year later, pioneering critic Svatopluk Ježek, writing in *La Revue Française de Prague*, complained, "Karel Anton is a lyrical poet of the screen, and yet he missed the gift of dramatic construction and editing. All his works are only beautiful picture albums."

Those are harsh words, unsupported by *Tonka of the Gallows* though undoubtedly true for some of the director's later work. The French press in particular expressed great enthusiasm (the film was released in France as *Tonischka*), with most articles affirming the opinion of *Hebdo-Film*, which stated: "Karl Anton has used all the means of expression offered by modern cinematographic techniques, but his personality has always allowed him to avoid the traps set by convention and sentimentality." *Tonka* appears not to have been distributed in the U.S. (however screenings for the Czech émigré community are likely) and, while *Variety* did publish a review from their Prague-based correspondent, the writer barely expresses an opinion, instead devoting considerable space to reporting on the appearance of noted songwriter and cabaret artist Karel Hašler in the prologue of the Czech sound version, who was also seated in a box at the screening.

Anton's tendency to slip in and out of cinema styles and genres was noted early on, when his 1921 debut, the lyrical *Cikáni* (*Gypsies*), was followed by films of entirely different emotional registers, such as the madcap detective comedy *Únos Bankére Fuxe* (*The Kidnapping of Fux the Banker*, 1923). After *Tonka* he moved back and forth between Berlin and Prague, making two fictionalized versions of Egon Erwin Kisch's reportage on Colonel Redl (István Szabó's 1985 film of the subject takes a very different approach) before settling for a time in France, where he churned out a number of frothy musicals such as *Un Soir de Réveillon* (1933), featuring a remarkably risqué young Arletty. By 1936 Anton returned to Germany, where his anti-Bolshevik epic *Weiße Sklaven* (*White Slaves*, 1937) was considered not anti-Communist enough until Goebbels, on Hitler's orders, forced the director to make several changes that increased the propaganda quotient. Anton must have learned his lesson, for apart from the uncredited work on *Ohm Krüger*, his subsequent films under the Reich, such as the enjoyable *Stern von Rio* (*Star of Rio*, 1940), starring La Jana, are pleasant yet stylistically and doctrinally undistinguished. His final directorial credit, fifteen years before his death in 1979, was for a television series in West Germany.

— Jay Weissberg

HUSBANDS AND LOVERS

MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT BY PHILIP CARLI

DIRECTED BY JOHN M. STAHL, USA, 1924
CAST Florence Vidor, Lewis Stone, Lew Cody, Dale Fuller, Winter Hall, and Edith (as Edythe) Yorke
PRODUCTION Louis B. Mayer Productions **PRINT SOURCE** Library of Congress

John M. Stahl is remembered as a master of the Hollywood melodrama, but this vague tribute has long stood in place of any precise understanding of the scope and qualities of his work. He has several strikes against him. The Technicolor noir *Leave Her to Heaven* (1945), probably his most widely seen film, is delicious but uncharacteristic in the coldness and cruelty lurking under its lushly stylized surface. The classic "woman's pictures" *Imitation of Life* (1934) and *Magnificent Obsession* (1935) have been eclipsed by Douglas Sirk's remakes in the 1950s. Stahl's superb, quietly radical early sound films *Seed* (1931), *Back Street* (1932), and *Only Yesterday* (1933) are frustratingly hard to see. And his silent movies, of which around a dozen titles are known to survive, are almost entirely unknown. Finally emerging from the archives, the silent films reveal Stahl's development, in less than a decade, from melodramas such as *Her Code of Honor* (1919) and *The Child Thou Gavest Me* (1921) that lurch with wild coincidences, shocking revelations, and extreme plot twists—rape, incest, infant abandonment—to a mature blend of humor, heartache, and unforced tenderness, as in the bittersweet *Memory Lane* (1926). On the way, he produced several deft, sophisticated light comedies, of which the most sparkling is *Husbands and Lovers*.

Although Stahl always claimed he was a native of New York, after his death evidence emerged that he was born Jacob Morris Strelitzsky in Baku, Azerbaijan, in 1886, and emigrated from there to the United States as a child. Facts about his early life and career remain elusive, but he got his start as an actor and, by his own testimony, began directing in 1914. His first official credit came in 1918 with *Wives of Men*, which also set a pattern for his focus on women's stories. He was hired by the film's producer, Grace Davison, one of several female star-producers with whom he worked in these early years. By 1920, he was well established and signed a seven-year contract with Louis B. Mayer and soon had his own production unit, releasing his films through First National.

In these prolific years, Stahl returned again and again to the subject of marriage and its discontents: jealousy, infidelity, the tedium and neglect that sets in when first love wears off, and women's taken-for-granted domestic drudgery. In 1924 he took a somewhat lighter view in two back-to-back comedies of remarriage, *Why Men Leave Home* and *Husbands and Lovers*. Both star Lewis Stone as the once and future husband. Stahl made a total of six films with Stone and seems to have valued him for his ability to personify male selfishness and insensitivity without entirely repelling audience sympathy, as well as for his subtle expressiveness and light comic touch. He needs these gifts since James, his character in *Husbands and Lovers*, is a particularly scathing portrait of oblivious entitlement, revealed through sharply drawn details of everyday behavior. The film opens with a long scene that establishes the nature of the central couple's marriage through their morning routine, which involves the wife, Grace (played by the lovely Florence Vidor), waiting on her husband hand and foot and cleaning up after him, only to be rewarded with smug, insulting criticisms of her appearance.

Grace responds by going out for a makeover and a fashionable new wardrobe, which earns her no points

Lew Cody and Florence Vidor. Photo courtesy of the Library of Congress

A PLACID SURFACE THAT INTENSIFIES THE FEELING BENEATH

with her husband but does attract the amorous attention of their friend Rex (Lew Cody). Annoyed by his compliments, James nastily tells his wife that Rex "would tell a one-legged woman her crutch was becoming." (The snappy, occasionally acid titles are by Madge Tyrone. The film's story is credited to Stahl's wife Frances Irene Reels, the last of their many collaborations before her death in 1926, and was adapted by another frequent collaborator, A.P. Younger.) Vidor is a perfect interpreter of Stahl's restrained, elegant, dryly amused style, though this was the only time he directed her. A popular and admired leading lady in the late teens and twenties, she retired with the coming of sound and of her silent films only a few are still watched today—one being Ernst Lubitsch's *The Marriage Circle* (1924), to which *Husbands and Lovers* was compared by several reviewers on its release.

The casting of Lew Cody was presumably intended to ensure that the audience would root for Stone. Cody specialized in playing smooth cads and lounge lizards; he has "Other Man" embroidered on him like a monogram, and a reptilian face that betrays little feeling. Still, his character hardly deserves the crushing humiliation to which he is subjected in the film's climactic scene, which presents one of Stahl's favorite tropes, that romantic comedy staple, the disrupted wedding. In his settings, the chocolate-box perfection of these elaborate ceremonies—the garlands of flowers, the legions of bridesmaids and groomsmen and tiny ring-bearers and flower girls, the solemn step-together-step-together rhythm of the procession—serves to heighten the effect when everything falls apart. This is the ultimate demonstration of Stahl's ability to layer formal, classical framing and violent emotion, giving his films a placid surface that intensifies the feeling beneath, as a magnifying glass focuses sunlight to a burning point.

The centerpiece of *Husbands and Lovers* is a scene of mistaken identity, a twist that might be hard to swallow if it were not staged with such assured style. Vidor sits by a window, with bars of light falling through shutter-slats casting slanted shadows across her, a beautiful twilight image that distills the ambivalence of her character. Stone stands almost completely concealed by darkness, with just a crescent of light tracing one side of his face; he advances into the light and then retreats back into the shadow, like the moon waxing and waning, as he listens silently to his wife's confession of love for another man. Cinematographer Tony Gaudio, who masterminded the extremely low lighting in this scene, went on to an illustrious career at Warner Brothers, shooting classics such as *Little Caesar*, *High Sierra*, *The Adventures of Robin Hood*, and *The Letter*, one of eleven pictures he photographed for the exacting Bette Davis. Stahl's visual style stands out in the silent features: his use of extreme deep focus; his love of shots framed by windows, doors, and mirrors; his use of formally arranged compositions to express relationships, as when the love triangle in *Husbands and Lovers* becomes a literal triangle, the two men seated on either side of a chess board and the woman at the apex between them.

Gaining popularity at a time when divorce was only just becoming more socially acceptable, remarriage dramas seem driven by conflicting desires to critique and affirm marriage, to flirt with being "modern" about adultery and women's autonomy, and yet to ensure a final retreat back into the romantic conventions of happily-ever-after. These films made comedy

Lewis Stone. Photo courtesy of the Library of Congress

out of the battle of the sexes and at the same time tried to smooth over the very divisions they illustrated, resulting in stubborn but interesting ambiguities of tone.

Stahl's own commitment to marital dramas seems to have wavered and, in November 1924, he apparently announced to the press that he would move away from these subjects, prompting *The Philadelphia Inquirer* to run the headline "Resolves To Stop Breaking Up Homes: John M. Stahl Has Wrecked His Last Home!" Like the husbands and wives in his films who toy with divorce only to reunite, Stahl would think twice, return to his first love, and continue to mine the dramatic possibilities of troubled marriages for many more years to come.

— Imogen Sara Smith

Expanded from the author's essay originally published in Giornate del Cinema Muto's 2018 program book.

RAPSODIA SATANICA

MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT BY MONT ALTO MOTION PICTURE ORCHESTRA

DIRECTED BY NINO OXILIA, ITALY, 1917
CAST Lyda Borelli, Andrea Habay, Ugo Bazzini, Giovanni Cini, and Alberto Nepoti **PRODUCTION** Cines
PRINT SOURCE Cineteca di Bologna

In his witty introduction to film historian Angela Dalle Vacche's seminal 2008 study *Diva: Defiance and Passion in Early Italian Cinema*, Canadian filmmaker Guy Maddin writes, "When on a shopping spree for anguish, rapture, martyrdom, comas, counts, rapes, bastards, orphans, dogaressas, philtres, sirens, suicides, mistaken identities, flower festivals, and sudden fatal loves—even a tattooed baby—one need look no further than the Italian Diva Film, a vast clearinghouse of art nouveau decors and nineteenth-century melodramatic devices still in wondrous working order." As Maddin's description makes clear, unlike today's contemporary meaning of "diva" as a glamorous but headstrong, sometimes difficult woman, the diva of Italian silent cinema was multifaceted and could even be heroic. Along with the melodrama, romance, and tragedy that characterized the plots, the films often tackled contemporary issues facing the increasingly independent women of the era.

The genre flourished in the 1910s. There are no tattooed babies in *Rapsodia Satanica*, a female version of the Faust legend, but there are flowers lavishly strewn, anguish and rapture, and of course, there is Mephisto, popping up bizarrely from a drawing-room table or lounging casually in the branches of a tree, offering to help an elderly crone regain youth and beauty in exchange for her soul.

The film features the leading Italian diva of the time, Lyda Borelli, a stage and screen star so famous and beloved that her name spawned new words in her native language, such as "borellismo" and "borellissimo," describing her acting style and her appeal, and "borelleggiare," a verb meaning to imitate Borelli. In the 1917 edition of his *Dizionario Moderno*, film critic Antonio Panzini explains borellismo as "young women fussing and moping around, in the manner of the beautiful Lyda Borelli's aestheticizing poses." As the "Silents Please" website notes approvingly of Borelli's emoting, "characterized by poses and dancelike movements based on painterly figures, it is an acting style that is out of fashion now, but breathtaking, and much appreciated in her time." In spite of what comes across today as exaggerated gestures and facial expressions, Borelli's presence in *Rapsodia Satanica*, with her sharp, pointed features and elegant movements, is compelling and at times mesmerizing.

Lyda Borelli is descended from several generations of a theatrical family and made her stage debut at the age of fifteen. By 1905, she was already a successful stage actress, appearing in the works of distinguished writers such as Gabriele D'Annunzio and Victorien Sardou. After Eleonora Duse's retirement she became Italy's leading theatrical star as well as toured in Spain and South America. Borelli made her first film in 1913, *Ma l'Amore Mio Non Muore!* (*Love Everlasting*), which was directed by Mario Caserini and is considered to be the first diva film. Her final screen appearance was in 1918, after more than a dozen films, several of them based on her stage successes. Borelli retired from acting after her marriage to a wealthy nobleman, Count Vittorio Cini. Her husband reportedly bought all the copies of her films and destroyed them. Luckily, some escaped that fate, with about two-thirds of her films since found and restored, including her debut film.

Top: Lyda Borelli. Bottom: Lyda Borelli and Giovanni Cini. Photos courtesy of the Cineteca di Bologna

EVERY BIT THE DIVA...

Befitting a star of Borelli's lofty status, the production values of her films were first-rate. According to Dalle Vacche, *Rapsodia Satanica* was shot and finished in 1914, but was not released until 1917. There were delays, likely because composer Pietro Mascagni (best known today for his 1890 opera *Cavalleria Rusticana*) "felt strongly that the music should rule over the image" and asked that changes be made to the film to accommodate his musical score. The film's original Italian-language intertitles, mysterious and occasionally lyrical, were created by poet Fausto Maria Martini. Also striking is the film's added color, both tinted and toned, as well as subtly and painstakingly stenciled throughout.

Every bit the diva in *Rapsodia Satanica*, Borelli acts with sweeping gestures, moving restlessly, constantly, and gracefully. Her performance was probably not meant to be realistic, but grand—always drawing the focus of attention to herself, even in moments of stillness. Much of Borelli's movement in *Rapsodia Satanica*, particularly her intensely theatrical full-body manipulation of a gauzy shawl, shows the influence of American dancer Loie Fuller who reportedly choreographed the movement in the film. And it is not only Borelli's physicality that reflects Fuller's influence. Mephisto's menacing presence, with his billowing robes and dramatic arm movements, also recall Fuller's famous "serpentine dance" featuring swirling, twirling garments. Born in a Chicago suburb, Fuller began as a child actress and worked in vaudeville and burlesque, eventually choreographing and performing her own highly original dances. Tired of her work being considered a novelty, she moved to Europe in 1892, settling in Paris and hobnobbing with intellectuals, artists, and celebrities such as painter Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, scientist Marie Curie, and Queen Marie of Romania. Fellow American dancer Isadora Duncan considered Fuller an influence on her own work.

Rapsodia Satanica director Nino Oxilia was not only a filmmaker, but also a poet and songwriter. Born in Turin in 1889, Oxilia as a young man became involved in the anti-bourgeois "Scapigliatura" movement, the Italian equivalent of the French bohemians. He began his career as a journalist, wrote for the theater, and directed Italian diva Francesca Bertini in *Sangue Bleu* (1914). The following year, Oxilia wrote the scenario for *Il Fior di Male*, which starred Borelli. Oxilia was killed in 1917 at age twenty-eight while serving in World War I. Years after his death, Oxilia earned posthumous notoriety of a sort when one of his songs, "Giovinezza," with new lyrics, became the anthem for Benito Mussolini's Fascists.

The costumes and décor in *Rapsodia Satanica* are very much in the fashion of the era, but also over-the-top and attention-grabbing in true diva style, with nods to Orientalism. Even when Borelli is sitting quietly playing the piano or walking in the orchard, she is always dressed sumptuously, swathed in yards of taffeta. When the plot calls for fancy dress, her costume is dripping with pearls and features elaborate headgear. Dalle Vacche describes one of Borelli's extravagant gowns as based on the couture creations of French designer Paul Poiret, and by the "lampshade look" created by Leon Bakst for the Russian ballet dancer Nijinsky. Her final diaphanous shroud is a beautiful rendering of Fortuny's pleated Delphos. The author adds that the film's plot "seems driven by the dresses used and the objects shown rather than by any significant action." While *Rapsodia Satanica*'s rife quotations from the artistic movements important in Italian and European culture at the time might not be readily understood by audiences today, the film's overall hugeness, from its melodramatic plot to the extravagant color palette, provides its own kind of enjoyment.

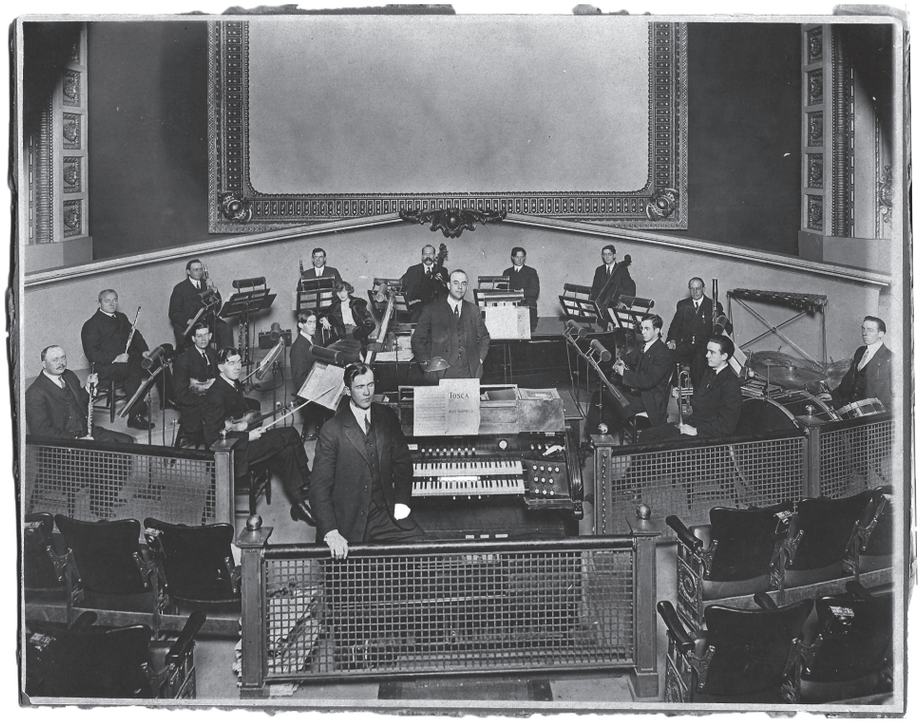
The era of the Italian diva film was relatively brief, from 1913 through the end of World War I, with a few additional films until about 1920. Perhaps the worldwide impact of the war, followed by cultural upheavals of the Roaring Twenties, rendered the passions, foibles, and obsessions of the diva era obsolete and even quaint. But the diva herself never really went away. And looking at a film like *Rapsodia Satanica* a century after its premiere, it's clear that, when it comes to love and sex, "the fundamental things apply," as the song goes. Passion and mortality, good and evil, all swirling around a willful, complicated woman never fails to fascinate.

— Margarita Landazuri

SHOW-STARTING COLOR

The black-and-white worlds of "old movies" are as familiar to us as the blue sky above, but since the very beginning movies have been shown in color. *Rapsodia Satanica* is a stunning example of "added color," with its tinting and toning as well as select stencil-applied accents. Early filmmakers also tinkered with "natural photography," reproducing the world as seen by the human eye. The first successful natural color system, Kinemacolor, used red and green filters in both photographing and projecting to produce as full a spectrum as was possible at the time. British producer Charles Urban backed the development of the process and, between 1908 and 1914, shot travelogues in color, most famously the two-hour *With Our King and Queen Through India* depicting the 1912 Delhi Durbar. When Urban films shot around the world first played in New York in 1909, *Moving Picture World* called them "of the greatest possible importance in connection with moving picture progress." In 1914, however, a lawsuit invalidated Urban's Kinemacolor patent and the process faded from the movies. Before the screening of *Rapsodia Satanica*, Cineteca di Bologna's Gian Luca Farinelli demonstrates recently restored Kinemacolor films and how color changes everything.

Andrea Habay and Lyda Borelli. Photos courtesy of Cineteca di Bologna



STRIKE UP THE ORCHESTRA!

by Fritzi Kramer

The hard-working piano player is an iconic image of silent cinema and with good reason: a 1922 poll of theater owners showed that solo piano was far and away the most popular form of musical accompaniment. But for something big and special? Well, there was nothing like an orchestra. By 1920, there were three hundred theater orchestras with thirty or more musicians in the United States but cue sheets and music created from collections of "photoplay" music were the norm. The bespoke orchestral score—either originally composed or arranged from existing music—created especially for a single film at the behest of filmmakers remained worthy of a prominent place in advertisements. In addition to the music itself, these scores contain a wealth of information about how the film in question was to be ideally played in the eyes of the distributor. Specific instructions regarding projection speed (exactly so many minutes per thousand feet of film), recommendations for substitute instruments if those called for were unavailable, and sometimes even suggestions for when to dim the house lights during the overture. How often these instructions were actually followed is a matter for debate.

OVER THE RAINBOW

Every story of custom film scores must begin in the Land of Oz. L. Frank Baum's 1908 roadshow "The Fairylogue and Radio-Plays" was a multimedia presentation that included slides, live actors, lectures by Baum, and motion picture sequences by the Selig Polyscope company featuring Romola Remus as Dorothy. The whole extravaganza was accompanied by twenty-seven musical numbers composed by Nathaniel D. Mann and his music is generally thought of as American movies' first bespoke score. None of the film sequences survive. Baum later entered into the film production business with composer Louis F. Gottschalk, who had written music for Baum's play *The Tik-Tok Man of Oz* (1913). The resulting company produced Oz-themed features like *His Majesty, the Scarecrow of Oz* (1914) and *The Magic Cloak of Oz* (1914). Gottschalk's score was featured conspicuously in advertisements for *The Patchwork Girl of Oz* (1914); reviews of the time described it as "splendid" and "a rare treat." A theater in Pennsylvania even engaged members of the Philadelphia orchestra to play along with the screening.

NAME-CHECKING COMPOSERS

Tailor-made film scores were hardly an American monopoly, with Europe actually leading the way. *L'Assassinat du Duc de Guise* (1908) was a standalone film and a prestige production from top to bottom. The picture featured original music by Camille Saint-Saëns, one of the most revered living French composers at the time. Saint-Saëns plunged in zealously, taking notes during a screening of the film and delivering a rousing and suspenseful score that complemented the enthusiastic on-screen slaughter of the unfortunate duke.

Russia was a major export market for French productions and producer Alexander Drankov decided what was good enough for *de Guise* was good enough for his costume epic *Stenka Razin*. Mikhail Ippolitov-Ivanov's score for the 1908 film, which could be played by orchestra, piano, or gramophone, incorporated the popular folk song "Mother Volga." The song, traditionally performed by chorus, was associated with the Volga pirate of the title and Russian audiences sang lustily along wherever the score played.

When George M. Cohan's play *The Meanest Man in the World* was brought to American screens in 1923, the Principal Pictures Corporation promised a "typical George M. Cohan score" arranged from his biggest hits of the last decade as well as marketing a tie-in sheet music of a new song.

FEATURES, HITS AND MISSES

Longer films allowed for more elaborate music. Pietro Mascagni's score for *Rapsodia Satanica* was intricately tied to not only the action on the screen but to its characters and themes. Other composers recognized that the crushing schedule of theater orchestras required some consideration. In his introduction to his score for *Monsieur Beaucaire* (1924), Hugo Riesenfeld wrote that he simplified the music as much as possible so that it could be played with limited rehearsal time.

Orchestras weren't the only ones who had to work quickly. Dmitri Shostakovich was engaged to compose an original score for *New Babylon* in December of 1928, with the piano music required in February of 1929 and an arrangement for a fourteen-piece orchestra due a month later. Maestro Shostakovich fulfilled his commission speedily; director Leonid Trauberg later recalled that the piano version was completed in just two weeks. Douglas Fairbanks's swashbuckler epics were always special events and had music to match. During the publicity campaign for the 1926 wall-to-wall red-and-green Technicolor spectacle *The Black Pirate*, composer Mortimer Wilson followed the star in a radio appearance to explain the film's nautical-flavored score and personally conducted selections. However, during the film's premiere in New York City, the audience's applause was so thunderous at points it drowned out the music.

Film scores did not always please everyone. In the case of *The Volga Boatman*, the generally acclaimed score by Riesenfeld was deemed insufficiently Slavic by Daniel Breeskin, director-in-chief of music for the Stanley-Crandall theater chain and Ekaterinoslav native. He took the matter personally and spent the rest of the year arranging his own selections to fit the picture.

No matter what the feature, local newspaper advertising made much of any special musical arrangements with the names of accompanying orchestras given a place of honor. In order to make this extravagant music more affordable, some theaters cut corners. A theater in Iowa advertised that it would only offer orchestra music for evening showings of *Monsieur Beaucaire* with matinees presumably being presented with cheaper, simpler accompaniment. Price difference: ten cents.

American Theatre orchestra, Salt Lake City, 1918

THE LOVE OF JEANNE NEY

MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT BY THE GUENTER BUCHWALD ENSEMBLE

DIRECTED BY G.W. PABST, GERMANY, 1927
CAST Édith Jéhanne, Uno Henning, Fritz Rasp, Brigitte Helm, Adolf Edgar Licho, Hertha von Walther, Siegfried Arno, and Eugen Jensen **PRODUCTION** Ufa **PRINT SOURCE** Murnau-Stiftung

Some pleasures of silent film are less cerebral than others. And I must admit, I love a good movie orgy. Give me women tabletop-dancing in short skirts, give me lurid shots of slavering men, have them pass around enough prop liquor to give all the extras cirrhosis. G.W. Pabst's *The Love of Jeanne Ney* (*Die Liebe der Jeanne Ney*) opens with a great example, featuring cigarettes, tambourines, bottles both full and empty, a portly officer mounting a barrel, women shedding dresses and sliding down banisters—and women's legs in unripped silk stockings, implying that the ladies who could obtain such luxuries in a war zone probably aren't ladies at all.

It is the Crimea toward the end of the Russian Civil War, as an intertitle helpfully informs us, and these are White Russians without much to celebrate, as they are about to be overrun by the Reds, but evidently "we're losing!" was as good an excuse as any. Pabst's camera is as giddy as the guests, slinking through the crowd and peering down from a landing. Shut in his room with a bottle and a funny-looking cigarette is black-marketeer and all-around heel Khalibiev, played by Fritz Rasp. Though he was by most accounts a nice fellow in real life, the camera always found something devious in Rasp, and here his whiskers and questionable teeth combine to give Khalibiev an uncanny resemblance to a rat. Watching the party unfold, a smile playing across his handsome face, is Andreas Lubov (Uno Henning), whom we swiftly discover is a Bolshevik there to prepare the ground for the eventual White retreat. Also shut away from the revelry are Jeanne Ney (Édith Jéhanne) and her father (Eugen Jensen), an ostensible diplomat who is secretly spying on the Bolsheviks.

Jeanne is in love with Andreas, but fate intervenes when Andreas's colleague kills her father after the espionage is discovered. She escapes the turmoil in Ukraine to flee to Paris, there to stay with her unpleasant uncle Raymond Ney (Adolf E. Licho) and her blind cousin Gabrielle (Brigitte Helm). Khalibiev follows Jeanne to Paris, where he schemes to marry Gabrielle and steal her inheritance and whatever else he can find in her father's office—and as Raymond is a detective, there is much to find, including a priceless diamond. Andreas has also gone to Paris to raise more money for the Bolsheviks and, not incidentally, reunite with his love.

The film is based on a 1924 novel by Ilya Ehrenburg, a prolific Soviet journalist, novelist, and memoirist who frequently traveled to western Europe. The novel was originally supposed to have been adapted in Soviet Georgia, but Germany was first past the post and, in 1927, *The Love of Jeanne Ney* was shot at the Ufa studios in Neubabelsberg and on location in Paris, with Fritz Wagner as cinematographer. Ehrenburg was invited by Pabst to observe filming, and Pabst added to the overall impression of fidelity to detail by consulting the Soviet embassy in Paris and (presumably via other less official channels) filling the opening debauch with authentic White Russian exiles. Ehrenburg, once he got over the initial dazzlement that seems to hit everyone during a movie filming, wound up disliking the results, "feeling that [his novel's] political topicality and tragic intonations were diluted by an exaggerated melodramatic plot and the imposition of a happy ending," wrote critic Sergei Kapterev.

Uno Henning and Édith Jéhanne. Photo courtesy of Murnau-Stiftung

BRISTLING WITH BEAUTY AND GROTESQUERIE

In some respects, Ehrenburg was not wrong. The movie introduces the life-and-death struggle between the revolutionaries and the old guard, only to lose interest in all that almost as soon as Jeanne's father expires. Andreas is certainly the nicest conceivable Bolshevik; one suspects the real article would have eaten him for breakfast. His money-raising assignment in Paris is a thread soon dropped as Jeanne reappears and Khalibiev gets busy trying to frame his rival for a murder.

Nor is the movie especially interested in the love story, title or no title. Before Jeanne leaves for Paris, there is an exceptionally beautiful scene of the lovers reunited in the midst of pounding rain. Jeanne forgives Andreas almost wordlessly, and then they embrace. There isn't a trace of overplaying, the scene is pure emotion. But there is little of this sort of thing later on, once we hit Paris. More typical is a scene where they walk together through the teeming mass of Paris's famed Les Halles, becoming smaller amid the throng. The exposition could have been conveyed another way, and even less is there a reason for this moment to take place in Les Halles. It's there chiefly because it's vibrant and cinematic. Once you accept that idea about, well, basically everything in the movie, *The Love of Jeanne Ney* becomes a wonderful experience.

Uno Henning. Photo courtesy of Murnau-Stiftung

Most of the scenes where Pabst springs to vivid life involve the smaller characters. Sig Arno, familiar from dozens of both German and later American movies, has a memorable scene where he's nearly upstaged by a parrot, although the bird gets the worst of it. To a modern audience, Brigitte Helm is by far the biggest name in the cast; at the time, she had only one other film to her credit, but that film was of course *Metropolis*. Gabrielle is gentle and forlorn, with unruly blonde hair that forms a halo; almost the first thing she says is, "I'm so lonely." It's an extravagant and gestural performance, but also touching, more so than the quieter and more natural work of Jéhanne. (Jéhanne also played the female lead in Raymond Bernard's *The Chess Player* from 1926, and, then in 1929, his *Tarakanova*, after which she seems to have disappeared. The Internet Movie Database quotes Bernard, without attribution, as claiming Jéhanne died as sound arrived.)

It is evident that Uncle Raymond is neglecting his daughter and cares only for money, a point driven home with his biggest scene. Having retrieved the aforementioned diamond, and in line for a $50,000 reward from its American owner, Raymond drifts into a reverie about his riches while his daughter sobs herself to sleep. Pabst shows us how the miserly detective imagines the cash being handed to him, how he envisions himself counting it. Raymond's face contorts into ecstasy, then madness as Pabst speeds up the film until the bills are flying by. Then at last, Raymond releases the vision, grabs the sides of the door to his safe and (there is no nicer word) humps it. There are few more literal images of capitalism run amok this side of *Greed*.

The Love of Jeanne Ney was made two years after *The Joyless Street* and two years before Pabst's best-known masterpiece, *Pandora's Box*; all three films cast a sharp eye on the treatment of women.

Jeanne finds herself being assaulted not once, but twice—first by her loathsome uncle, and then by Khalibiev. Then there is the role of Margot (Hertha von Walther), one of those minor *Jeanne Ney* characters that Pabst seems to love. She is a barmaid and a sometime paramour of Khalibiev and is at first unruffled by his obvious criminality. Then he confesses to Margot that he intends to strangle Gabrielle after they are married. A horrified Margot runs away and shows up the next day to warn the girl. Margot kneels, frantically trying to convince Gabrielle she's in danger; the scene combines realism (the familiar difficulty in separating someone from an abusive lover) with melodrama in a way that seems to sum up the whole movie's appeal. Bristling with beauty and grotesquerie, ping-ponging from theme to theme and major to minor character and back again, *Jeanne Ney* shows that Pabst was a fascinating filmmaker even without Garbo or Louise Brooks.

— Farran Smith Nehme

G.W. PABST: A Survey

by Bryher

MR. Pabst formerly worked a long time for the theatre. Four years ago he decided that as far as the art of the future was concerned, the theatre had no possibility of development. Since he came to that decision (and we can imagine it was not an easy one to make) he has made six films. Unfortunately I have seen only three, though "stills" from the others convince me of the sincerity and interest of all his work.

The three films I have seen are *Joyless Street*, *Secrets of the Soul*, and *Die Liebe der Jeanne Ney*.

I came late to the cinema and I came because of *Joyless Street*. For years it never occurred to me that movies were worth consideration. I actually went to Hollywood without the slightest idea that they made films there and was much perturbed and quite uninterested when famous stars "shot" scenes under my bedroom window. Enthusiasts on my return to Europe occasionally persuaded me to a cinema. I did not dislike them but felt they had no link with my particular development. Then one wet dismal afternoon in Switzerland I went to *Joyless Street*. And saw what I had looked for in vain in post-war literature, the unrelenting portrayal of what war does to life, of the destruction of beauty, of (as has been said) the conflict war intensifies between those primal emotions, "hunger and eroticism." It was all too right ...

YET I read a short time ago in an American paper that *Joyless Street* was distorted and untrue. And that will be, I fear, the immediate criticism of Pabst's pictures. Because average people, average critics, dare not face the truth in his films. (Just as at the showing of the English official war film, *The Battle of Arras*, the comment across the cinema was, "they ought not to show the corpses and the wounded!" People love cheering the men trickling forward against shells but they obliterate without sense of wrongdoing what waste and suffering a battle must entail.) For myself I could only say after seeing *Die Liebe der Jeanne Ney* in the Neubabelsberg projection room, "it is too true." For actual threads of thought appear in front of one, actual life, actual pain, actual moments of beauty, passed through a mind that is as the machine that records heart beats or the sensations of a leaf.

SO *Joyless Street* recorded the whirlpool of destruction that is war as *Die Liebe der Jeanne Ney* records the awkwardness and cruelty of changing, not yet adapted civilizations. Not banners and glory and spiritual rebirth as old ladies and newspapers and leaders of the nations preached in 1914. But death and the loosening of the barriers and the shattering of decent impulse. First one gate goes, then another, with intellect and beauty, as always the first sacrifice. The old scholar, the children, the young beautiful girl. Or the two lovers in *Jeanne Ney*. The right to think, to individual judgment, even the right to sympathy. No book has put down the reaction of defeat on conquerors and defeated alike as *Joyless Street* has done. For this reason no doubt it was censored where it was shown or attempted to be shown. And no book (except H.D. in her short story "Murex") has so caught the sense of beauty broken by war.

It is the thought and the feeling that line gesture that interest Mr. Pabst. And he has what few have, a consciousness of Europe. He sees psychologically and because of this, because in a flash he knows the sub-conscious impulse or hunger that prompted

FIRST ONE GATE GOES, THEN ANOTHER, WITH INTELLECT AND BEAUTY, AS ALWAYS THE FIRST SACRIFICE.

an apparently trivial action, his intense realism becomes through its truth, poetry. He himself said once in conversation, "What need is there for romantic treatment? Real life is too romantic and too ghostly." And his drab rooms and their inhabitants, so cruel or blindly brave, so infinitely of life with all the problems of modern Europe surging about their hands or faces, become not only this actual world but abstractions of reality, like the myths men made of long ago seafarings or fights, like the statues men made through these myths, of pure ideas.

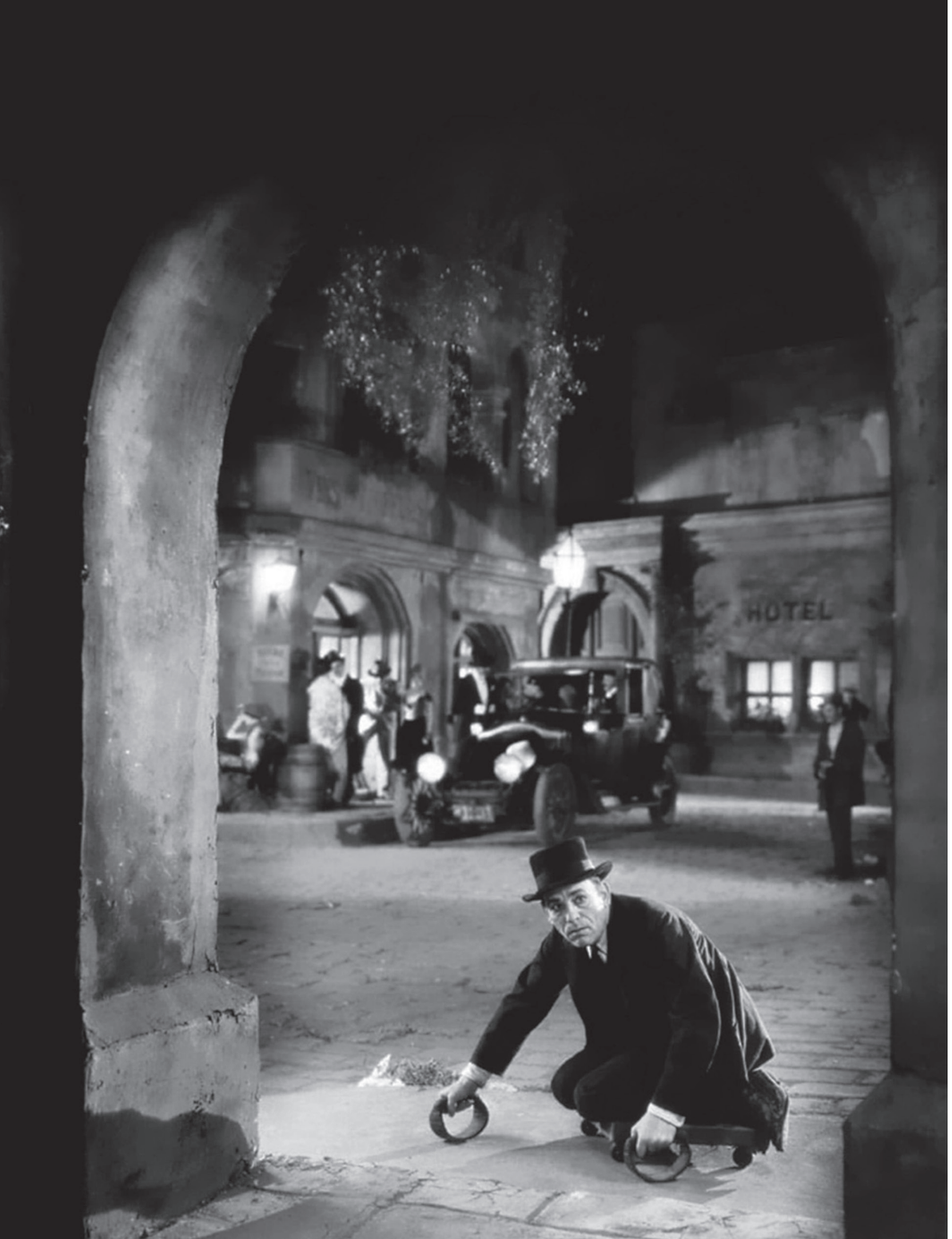
AND people clamour that films are not art! No play I have ever seen or read has affected me so profoundly as *Joyless Street* or *Jeanne Ney*. I wanted to cry out at each, I know this, I know that beauty is a gull in a storm, I know exactly how destructive human hunger can be, but knowing this, if one is to live, there is a limit to endurance of vision. For to watch them is to face what all if they could, would willingly forget.

Excerpted from the original published in the December 1927 issue of *Close Up*.

Photograph by Man Ray

ABOUT BRYHER

Heir to a shipping fortune and champion of the Lost Generation, Annie Winifred Ellerman wrote under the pen name Bryher. Along with her lifelong companion H.D. (Hilda Doolittle) and her legal spouse Kenneth Macpherson, she founded the publication *Close Up* in 1927. Packed with film reviews, interviews, reports on national cinemas, and pages of stills, the magazine championed European and Soviet cinema and offered alternative takes on the Hollywood factory system. In 1930, the trio made their own film, *Borderline*, about an interracial relationship that starred American actor Paul Robeson. Based in Switzerland, Ellerman used her wealth to support writers and to evacuate at least one hundred Jews from Hitler's Germany. In 1933, the year the magazine ceased publication, her article "What Shall You Do in the War?" appeared on its pages urging readers to take action, five years before the Anschluss and Kristallnacht. A poet and novelist as well she later became known for historical fiction set in her native Britain.



Lon Chaney

WEST OF ZANZIBAR

MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT BY STEPHEN HORNE AND FRANK BOCKIUS

DIRECTED BY TOD BROWNING, USA, 1928
CAST Lon Chaney, Lionel Barrymore, Mary Nolan, Warren Baxter, Jacqueline Gadsdon, Roscoe Ward, Kalla Pasha, and Curtis Nero **PRODUCTION** Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer **PRINT SOURCE** Warner Bros.

One of the great creative duos of the silent era was that between "Man of a Thousand Faces" Lon Chaney and his most frequent director, Tod Browning. The two came from similar professional backgrounds—on the low end of the theatrical world—entering movies at around the same time (1912–1913). They first worked together at Universal then, after a fashion, reunited at MGM.

Though the works for which both are best remembered—Chaney for *Hunchback of Notre Dame* and *Phantom of the Opera*, Browning for *Dracula* and *Freaks*—were made without one another, their decade-long collaboration has only gained stature in the century since. Their cinema of the macabre, so often built around the fear and pathos induced by "freakish" outsiders, has only grown more aligned with popular taste. The so-called horror subjects rarely put on screen in 1920s Hollywood are now central to an entertainment industry revolving almost entirely around fantastical themes, from malevolent supernatural forces to comic-book superheroes.

When Browning and Chaney first teamed up on 1919's *The Wicked Darling*, World War I had just ended, and the permanently maimed and disabled were still flooding homeward. It has been the matter of much scholarly speculation that the popularity of their movies—whether made together or apart—reflected the public's queasy fascination with physical "difference" as such war veterans returned, their visible hard luck so at odds with the glittering ethos of the "Roaring Twenties."

By the same token, what some have termed the "Browning-Chaney freak circus" struck certain cultural watchdogs as aesthetically repugnant and morally suspect. Famous for elaborate physical metamorphoses and painstaking makeup in his screen roles, the actor always generated respect. However, critics were often sharply divided about the director and the seamy results of their work together. Perhaps none of those works ignited more soapboxing disgust as *West of Zanzibar*, the pair's penultimate collaboration.

It surprised many back in 1928 that Chester de Vonde's drama *Kongo*, which ran for 135 performances on Broadway in 1926, was adapted for the screen at all. It was lurid stuff even for the wicked stage, centering on a magician who is crippled during an altercation with his wife's lover. Determined to wreak vengeance—particularly after the wife dies, leaving a baby behind—the conjuror takes off for Africa, hoping to lure his nemesis (now an ivory trader) into a trap. His scheme involves playing "white god" to a local tribe of superstitious natives while keeping the now-grown child in a state of debasement. There is redemption at the end of the film adaptation, but it's not enough to remove its taint of leering intrigue, aboriginal stereotypes (including human sacrifice), and hate-fueled relationships.

Nonetheless, the material had the kind of ingenious-criminal-con-job hook Browning deployed in his own original screenplays and it provided Chaney with yet another impressive physical transformation, this time with little makeup required. After his first-reel fall in a struggle with Crane (Lionel Barrymore), Phroso becomes "Dead-Legs," the actor scuttling around the rest of the movie with a vicious energy even as he drags his useless lower limbs behind him, convinc-

AS USUAL THE CENSORS WERE OUT OF TOUCH

ingly inert. Mary Nolan, as Maizie the daughter, and Warner Baxter, as "Doc" (just before his Oscar-winning success as *In Old Arizona*'s Cisco Kid), play the lovers who, in this bleak vision, must pass through a hellfire of implied prostitution and explicit alcoholism before being allowed an escape.

In fact, dipsomania was a polite substitute for a different affliction in the original stage script. *Harrison's Report*, a self-described advocate for independent exhibitors, remembered *Kongo* and asked in a front-page editorial, "How any normal person could have thought this horrible syphilitic play could have made an entertaining picture?" The film fueled the crusades of the censorship-minded, who used it as blatant evidence of Hollywood's "cesspools."

As usual the censors were out of touch. Sensational potboilers from the workshop of this dark duo were box-office catnip and *West of Zanzibar* did quite well at the box office, thank you very much. After its premiere in late 1928, *Motion Picture News*, another exhibitor-focused trade publication, wrote: "If you do not have a Standing Room Only sign in your theatre ... you had better order one immediately before playing this picture." The film is enjoyable today as florid melodrama, with its typically fine Chaney performance, even if it's not the best of his work with Browning. That title may belong to their vampire thriller, *London After Midnight*. Alas, the last complete print of the 1927 film was lost in a 1967 studio vault fire.

West of Zanzibar's success aside, time was running out on their creative partnership. MGM couldn't help but notice that Chaney's biggest hits were for other directors—and the biggest of all, 1926's *Tell It to the Marines*, wasn't even a "grotesque" role but a conventional nails-tough-with-heart-of-gold military sergeant one. (The real-life U.S. Marines liked his portrayal so much they granted him honorary Corps membership.) After their underwhelming tenth and last feature together, *Where East Is East* (1929), MGM did not renew Browning's contract. He accepted an offer to return to Universal, which left Chaney's only talkie *The Unholy Three*—a remake of his 1925 Browning smash—in the hands of another director.

The actor died just weeks after its release, complications from pneumonia and lung cancer having spiraled out of control. He'd been originally cast as the star of what proved to be Browning's own greatest box-office success, 1930's *Dracula*. With Chaney gone, the role went to its stage interpreter, Hungarian thespian Bela Lugosi and another horror star was born.

Dracula's enormous popularity fast-tracked Browning's return to MGM, under highly favorable financial terms and the protection of longtime ally, production chief Irving Thalberg. But if *West of Zanzibar* irked the censorious, his *Freaks* from 1932 set them afire. Its cast of real-life carny performers struck many as deeply distasteful and it proved a major contributor to Hollywood's stringent enforcement of the Production Code beginning in 1934. Though not universally decried at the time, *Freaks* was enough of a scandal and money-loser that Browning's career never fully recovered. In subsequent decades, however, it has been cultishly re-evaluated, even adored.

"When I quit a thing, I quit it," Browning snapped later on, claiming he no longer had any interest in seeing (let alone making) movies. But then the "Edgar Allan Poe of cinema" was always taciturn, with former coworkers describing him as "hard to please"—among other, blunter terms. Despite making two of the best fantastical films of the mid-1930s, *Mark of the Vampire* and *The Devil Doll*, his gruesome sensibility grew increasingly out of place amid MGM's reach for glamor and prestige. By the end of 1941, his status at the studio was so reduced that he preferred retirement. Sadly, soon after, his wife Alice died—also of complications from pneumonia—leaving him something of a Malibu recluse for the two remaining decades of his life.

West of Zanzibar (which bears no relationship to a 1954 British adventure movie of the same name) went unseen for many years, resurfacing in the 1970s after the Production Code was retired in favor of a ratings system. But despite all its outré racial politics and other unsavory aspects, it never quite went away. Footage from it was incorporated into other later "jungle" movies, including its own official remake in 1932. *Kongo* not only restored the original play's title but also its Broadway star Walter Huston, while managing to out-sleaze the silent version.

There is another curious connection between the two films, an odd footnote: A strapping African-American actor named Curtis Nero appears as a menacing tribesman in both, virtually his only credited screen roles. As "Bumbu" in *Zanzibar*, he stands around looking fierce, his sinewy torso glisteningly oiled-up, before getting one of the great purple intertitle lines of all time: "Fire … ready … for … white … girl!"

— Dennis Harvey

Lon Chaney

LIGHTS OF OLD BROADWAY

MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT BY PHILIP CARLI

DIRECTED BY MONTA BELL, USA, 1924
CAST Marion Davies, Conrad Nagel, Frank Currier, Julia Swayne Gordon, Charles McHugh, Eleanor Lawson, George K. Arthur, Matthew Betz, and Karl Dane **PRODUCTION** Cosmopolitan Productions **PRINT SOURCE** Library of Congress

By 1924, Metro Pictures was ailing. Founded in 1915 it had major successes with child star Jackie Coogan, "Great Stone Face" Buster Keaton, and sensational Rudolph Valentino in *Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* (1921). But Metro lost Valentino to Paramount and was also in need of more theaters to better control exhibition. Goldwyn Pictures was in trouble, too, thanks to internecine fights between management and board. A merger could mitigate their respective business worries. When Metro and Goldwyn united on April 17, 1924, with the manipulative, canny, and robust Louis B. Mayer in charge, it became the nascent film empire Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. Twenty-four-year-old "Boy Wonder" Irving Thalberg, formerly at Universal, was signed as supervisor of production.

Mayer's next move was to absorb Cosmopolitan Productions headed by publishing titan William Randolph Hearst, who used it primarily as an outlet for his mistress, former Ziegfeld chorine Marion Davies. It was a cozy arrangement among giants, as Hearst's many papers throughout the country acted as direct media pipelines not only for Cosmopolitan, but also for MGM's entire roster.

In March of 1925, MGM bought the film rights to Laurence Eyre's recent Broadway play, *Merry Wives of Gotham*, as a vehicle for Davies. Set in Old New York, primarily in 1880, it laces historical drama with comedy, with a plucky heroine at its center. By the time *Lights of Old Broadway* was made, Davies had proven herself both a talented actress and savvy businesswoman, basically running Cosmopolitan, securing a percentage of the film's profits, and collecting a $10,000 a week salary. Just before production began in late May, Davies, Hearst, and Mayer approved the former journalist and actor Monta Bell as director. Bell had only been directing for a year but had already demonstrated a facility for comedy, with *Broadway After Dark* (1924) and *Pretty Ladies* (1925), and for drama, with *The Snob* (1924) and *Lady of the Night* (1925).

The setup for *Lights of Old Broadway* is ripe. Two infant girls are found abandoned on a ship crossing the Atlantic to America. Baby Anne is adopted by the wealthy De Rhondes of fashionable Washington Square, while her twin Fely is adopted by the O'Tandys, immigrants to Upper Manhattan's Irish shantytown. Anne grows up to be the very essence of a genteel silver-spooned young lady, while gap-toothed Fely is all rough-and-tumble vivacity. Their lives are destined to intersect when Anne's brother (Conrad Nagel, well cast as a sensitive, handsome scion) falls in love with Fely. Before complications are resolved in the seventh reel, there are class and ethnic conflicts, a brilliantly realized street riot, romance, noble sacrifice, reversal of fortunes, and ample comedy and drama for the gifted Davies. To further burnish the entertainment value, famous names of show business, politics, and science from the era are woven into the plot, including vaudevillians Joe Weber and Lew Fields, impresario Tony Pastor, Thomas Edison, and a spunky young Teddy Roosevelt.

Lights of Old Broadway was supervised by the overworked Thalberg, in charge of no less than seventeen of MGM's thirty-three productions that year. Neither Mayer nor Hearst made his job easier.

Marion Davies. Photo courtesy of Photofest

Marion Davies. Photo courtesy of the Library of Congress

During production, Hearst sent multitudinous telegraphs with suggestions on how to proceed. Thalberg didn't appreciate the meddling, going so far as to issue an ultimatum to Mayer: either Hearst desists with such intrusions, or he (Thalberg) won't produce any more Cosmopolitan films. To pacify Thalberg, Mayer predicted Hearst would be grateful once the film was released to public approval. Mayer was at least successful in preventing Thalberg's wholesale defection from Cosmopolitan's productions.

Mayer and Hearst meanwhile devised a massive publicity campaign. In April of 1925, Hearst's *New York American* announced a "Coast-to-Coast party," a train excursion from New York to California, with sightseeing layovers in Niagara Falls and the Grand Canyon. Passengers would disembark in Hollywood, with party guests "guided through the vast studios, but [also], through the courtesy of Metro-Goldwyn Mayer unit, an invitation has been extended to the *American*'s party to witness the 'shooting' of actual scenes!" The trainload of passengers arrived in Hollywood that July to observe *Lights of Old Broadway* in production on the Culver City lot. Some reportedly appear as extras.

Lights of Old Broadway was made for a princely $321,000 on a thirty-five day schedule, with a good portion of its budget devoted to two expensive color sequences. Reel two features vaudeville acts filmed in two-strip Technicolor, with inserts of the audience tinted in amber. It's an early example in American cinema of color used to enhance not just visual mood but storytelling as well, the vibrancy of the stage contrasting with the monochrome audience. The second scene features the historic 1880 lighting of New York's electric streetlamps, with a crowd looking on in awe and delight. The large American flag in this scene is finished in the Max Handschiegl process, a kind of spot coloring wherein color was painstakingly added to film prints.

COLOR USED TO ENHANCE NOT JUST VISUAL MOOD BUT STORYTELLING AS WELL

Lights of Old Broadway opened in November 1925 to positive reviews. Not surprisingly, much of the glow came from the Hearst newspaper syndicate. "Not only is Marion Davies's *Lights of Old Broadway* the finest cinema achievement of the month; it is also a safe bet for a place among the best of the year," noted the *Chicago American.* "Marion Davies returns to the field in which she has proved herself – the bright, particular light-historical and romantic comedy drama … Miss Davies is superb as Fely," noted the *Baltimore News.* Even a paper *not* owned by Hearst, the *Chicago Tribune*, loved her: "Marion Davies is adorable … if I know you at all, you're going to come out of the theater mightily satisfied."

To everyone's stunned disappointment, *Lights of Old Broadway* failed to garner much early business, with Hearst laying the blame at Thalberg's feet. In his defense, Thalberg told Davies the problem was with Hearst, who he claimed over-hyped the film and ran an ill-conceived ad campaign. True to character, Hearst shot back with a telegram to Davies, distancing himself from production decisions: "THINK WE MUST REALIZE PICTURE WASN'T BEST EVER PRODUCED … MY FUNCTION IN COMBINATION ARRANGEMENT WITH COMPANY IS FIRST TO PROVIDE GOOD STORY AND LATER TO PROMOTE THE PICTURE. I DIDN'T SELECT THIS STORY OR LIKE IT. THE PLAY HAD BEEN A FAILURE. PICTURE WAS NOT A STAR VEHICLE IN MY HUMBLE OPINION."

While Hearst and Thalberg traded accusations, something fortuitous happened. Word of mouth, not Hearst's heavy-handed marketing, turned *Lights of Old Broadway* into a hit. Mayer wisely stayed above the Hearst-Thalberg fracas, swooping in just as the film began making its eventual $109,000 profit. "Mayer moved quickly to congratulate Hearst and Thalberg for getting off to such an excellent start in their mutual endeavors," remembered MGM story editor Samuel Marx. "Hearst wired his appreciation and Thalberg went to work preparing a half-dozen new Davies films."

Despite her abundant charm here and in other films like *Little Old New York* (1923), *The Patsy* (1928), and *Show People* (1928), memory of Davies is tainted with the notion she had no talent, that her career is due entirely to Hearst's intervention. That reputation was solidified with Orson Welles's *Citizen Kane* (1941), in which a Hearst-like figure cruelly pushes mistress and third-rate singer Susan Alexander into the limelight. But Davies didn't help her own legacy by maintaining large amounts of humility and insecurity throughout her life. She retired in 1937 and came to believe she wasn't very good. In her memoirs *The Times We Had*, published posthumously in 1975, she wrote, "I couldn't act, but the idea of silent pictures appealed to me, because I couldn't talk either." Her self-assessment is just plain wrong. Fortunately for us, there are numerous surviving films demonstrating the sublime and enduring artistry of Marion Davies.

— Matthew Kennedy

Joseph Harris, Harry Carey, and Vester Pegg. Photo courtesy of Universal Pictures

HELL BENT

MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT BY PHILIP CARLI

DIRECTED BY JOHN FORD, USA, 1918
CAST Harry Carey, Duke R. Lee, Neva Gerber, Vester Pegg, and Joseph Harris **PRODUCTION** Universal Film Manufacturing Company **PRINT SOURCE** Universal Pictures

Preceded by Baby Peggy and Brownie the Wonder Dog in BROWNIE'S LITTLE VENUS (1921)

When *Hell Bent*, starring Harry Carey as Cheyenne Harry, was released in 1918 it was among eighty-seven western features made that year, a high point in the first decade of feature-length films. In that crowded field were William S. Hart, who made nine westerns for his own production company, and Tom Mix, who made six with the Fox Film Corporation. Harry Carey was part of that productive pack, with seven features for Universal.

Carey had been in films since 1910, acting for D.W. Griffith at the Biograph Company and moving out to California with the company in 1911. In 1915 Carey joined Universal, and starred in his first "Cheyenne Harry" feature as a cowboy drifter with a knack for finding trouble. In 1916 he reprised the role in a series of short two-reelers directed by Fred Kelsey, known more for his comedy roles in nearly five hundred films than for his directing. Kelsey and Carey disagreed over the direction of the series and parted ways in 1917. Francis Ford, Universal's big-name director-actor, suggested that his younger brother Jack take over the directing chores.

Jack Ford had worked his way up in the film business, as a bit-player, assistant director, and writer under the mentorship of Francis, and then starred in and directed his own two-reelers at Universal. Meeting Carey changed the course of Jack's career, putting him on the road to becoming the John Ford we know today. When a twenty-three-year-old Ford met Carey, sixteen years his senior, they took a liking to each other, forming a collaborative relationship that produced twenty-six westerns.

Although born in New York, Harry Carey had a fascination for the American West and, after making movies in California for six years, he bought a ranch near Newhall in 1917, using it for the outdoor scenes in many of his westerns, *Hell Bent* included. Ford and Carey stayed out there when they weren't shooting interiors and town scenes at Universal City, some twenty-five miles south of the ranch. They filmed by sunlight and, at night over a campfire, fleshed out scenes to shoot the next day. They had a definite idea for their films: character studies of western life, featuring basic emotions mixed with rugged terrain and primitive settings.

In *Hell Bent*, Cheyenne Harry is on the run from the law after a card game gone wrong, but encounters a ruthless bunch of outlaws in another town who make him look good by comparison. A review by Peter Milne in *Motion Picture News* acknowledged the typical western story essentials but singled out Ford for taking it to a higher level with "a realism that is altogether successful in snatching the spectator from his chair and setting him down in the midst of the great wastes of the West," and simply stated: "The photography is wonderful."

Cinematographer Benjamin F. Reynolds was the third essential collaborator needed to complete this vision for the Carey-Ford westerns. He was shooting newsreels for the Universal Animated Weekly and was an assistant cameraman on low-budget dramatic productions when the studio assigned him to photograph John Ford's *The Scrapper*, which Ford starred in and directed. When Ford quit acting,

he took Reynolds along to shoot his first Carey picture, *The Soul Herder* (1917). After one more short, *Cheyenne's Pal* (1917), the team graduated to features with *Straight Shooting* (1917). In two years Reynolds shot twelve Carey features and earned a well-deserved reputation as a skilled cinematographer. In 1919 he became chief cinematographer for Erich von Stroheim's first directing effort, *Blind Husbands*, and Reynolds continued on with Stroheim through his epic melodrama *Greed* (1924). Reynolds remained active until 1935, when ill health forced his retirement.

Hell Bent's love interest, Bess, is played by Neva Gerber, who appeared opposite Carey in three subsequent titles, but she was no newcomer. She had been acting since 1912 and had racked up at least 130 credits by 1930 when she retired at the age of thirty-eight. For much of her career she worked with director-actor Ben F. Wilson, appearing in fifty-two films. In *Hell Bent*, Harry Carey and Duke R. Lee, who plays Cimmaron Bill, harmonize to an old Stephen Foster song, "Sweet Genevieve," perhaps an in-joke referencing Neva, whose birth name was Genevieve.

One of the most distinctive locations Ford and Carey used for *Hell Bent* was a pass through the San Gabriel and Santa Susana mountain ranges known today as Beale's Cut. It is a deep gash, thirty feet wide and some seventy feet deep, first excavated in 1854, but not fully functional until 1864. In the film, a stagecoach drives through the pass, and Carey rides up later on horseback, throwing a rope to climb to the top. Several angles show the cut in its prime, although the Newhall Tunnel, built in 1910, had already rendered it obsolete by the time of filming. Ford returned to the location for other films, notably to shoot a spectacular jump for the Tom Mix film *Three Jumps Ahead* (1923) and later for his classic western, 1939's *Stagecoach*. Although partially collapsed by the 1994 Northridge Earthquake, Beale's Cut can still be seen today, a short hike in from the Sierra Highway.

Set for a July 1918 release, *Hell Bent* ran into problems with the Ohio censor board, which objected to the title. For its release in that state alone, *Hell Bent* became *The Three Bad Men*. Censorship was a complicated process with films having to pass boards state by state. Two of the more notorious boards were in Ohio and Pennsylvania, but the most restrictive board might have been in Chicago, where the whole story of a film could be dramatically altered by mandatory cuts. For *Hell Bent*, Chicago censors demanded that all scenes of a stagecoach holdup in the first reel be removed, a robbery in reel four had to be cut, as did a shootout in reel five.

Harry Carey. Photo courtesy of Universal Pictures

Harry Carey became a wealthy man as he transitioned from shorts to features. In 1917 he earned $150 a week. The next year, his salary jumped to $1,250 a week in his new contract with Universal. In 1919 it increased to $2,500. John Ford's pay grew much more slowly, from $75 to $300 during the same period. The salary differential was a sore point between the two men, so in 1919 Ford broke up the team, directing westerns that starred instead Pete Morrison, Buck Jones, and Hoot Gibson. Ford and Carey made *Desperate Trails*, their last western together, in 1921. Carey continued to make westerns with a variety of directors until 1927, when he abandoned movies for vaudeville. He made an on-screen comeback in the successful MGM action-adventure film *Trader Horn* (1931) and continued to work steadily in programmers until his death in 1947, garnering an occasional plum role like the president of the Senate in *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939).

Jack Ford first took directing credit as John Ford with *Cameo Kirby* (1923), a period drama for Fox Film starring John Gilbert, and hit the big time with the epic western *The Iron Horse* (1924), which became the top grossing film of the year. Having proven himself in westerns, Ford diversified and went on to win four Academy Awards, none of them for directing his famous westerns. Ford returned frequently to the genre, however, often elevating it to iconic status. At the time of Carey's death, Ford was finishing a remake of the Peter B. Kyne story he had done with Carey in 1919 as *Marked Men*. At the end of the picture, *3 Godfathers*, Ford included a dedication: "To the Memory of Harry Carey, Bright Star of the early western sky ..." over an image of a lone rider set against the setting sun. It was a fitting coda to a long career.

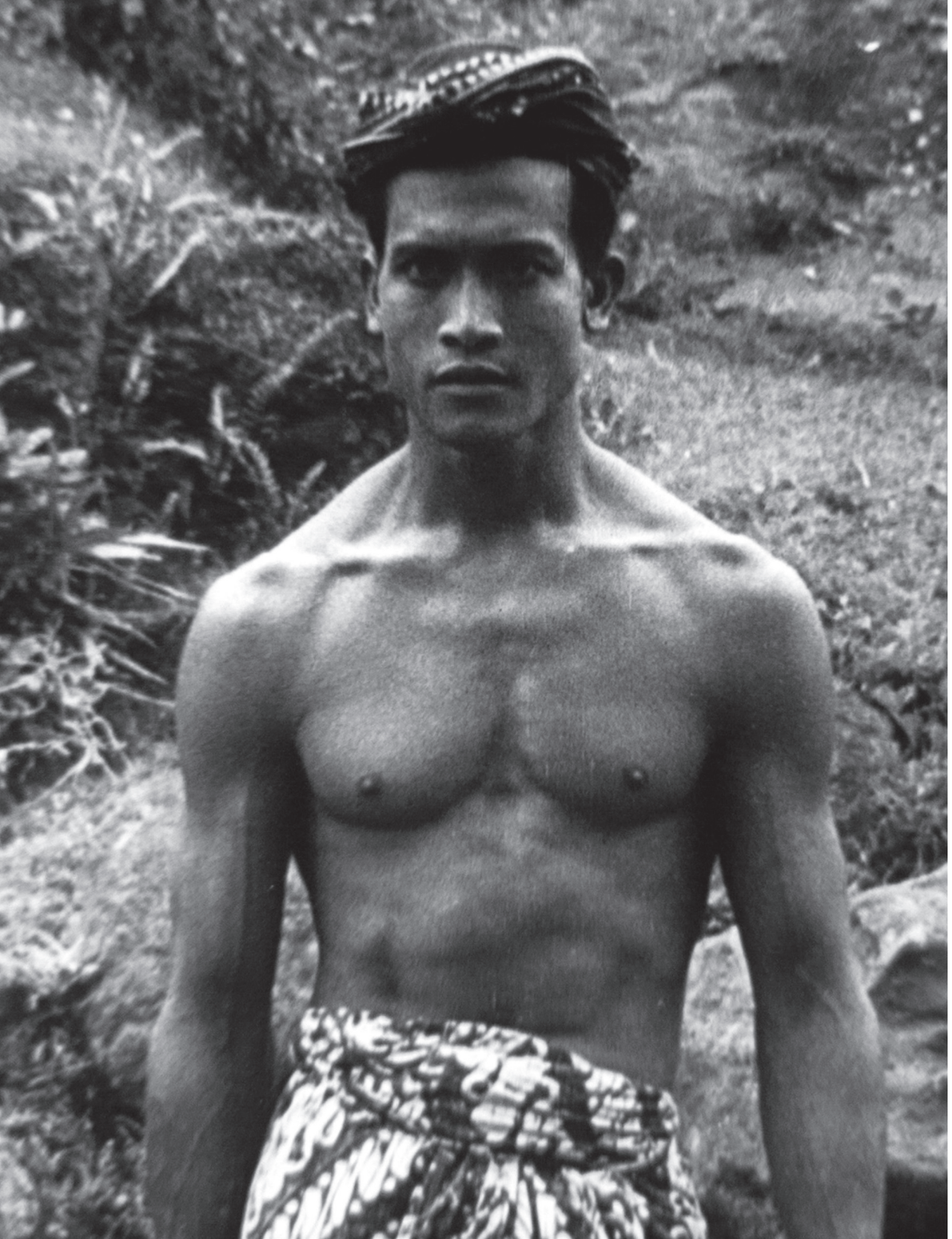
— David Kiehn

BROWNIE'S LITTLE VENUS

In celebration of Baby Peggy's 101st Birthday

At just eighteen months old Baby Peggy caught the eye of Fred Hibbard as a possible cute human half for Century Comedies' Brownie the Wonder Dog series. The bull-terrier mix with made-to-order muzzle markings was a rescue whose films became one of the studio's biggest draws. After Baby Peggy and Brownie were paired in 1921's appropriately named *Playmates*, she became a star as well. In her 1996 memoir, Diana Serra Cary, the former Baby Peggy, recalls that she and Brownie "turned out a veritable blizzard of fast-paced, two-reelers … Referred to on the lot as 'five-day wonders,' they were produced at what seemed the speed of light." She soon graduated to a career in features with a lucrative contract at Universal, but by then the hardworking Brownie was gone. Eight years her senior, he died a year into their partnership. Not much from their blizzard of films survive and *Brownie's Little Venus* is a lucky find from the Cinémathèque Suisse. Directed by Fred Hibbard, and costarring Lillian Biron and Bud Jamison.

Print Source UCLA Film and Television Archive



Wyan. Photo courtesy of the Library of Congress

GOONA GOONA: AN AUTHENTIC MELODRAMA OF THE ISLE OF BALI

MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT BY CLUB FOOT GAMELAN

DIRECTED BY ANDRÉ ROOSEVELT AND ARMAND DENIS, BALI, 1932
CAST OF CHARACTERS Wyan, Dasnee, Seronee, Ktot, Prince Nonga, Princess Maday, and Prince Okah
PRINT SOURCE Library of Congress

However neglected, perhaps correctly, the history of independent exploitation films is as long as any other varietal of film—the nudie, the sensational barnstormer, the adults-only "if you dare" faux-exposé have always been with us. How we might approach this kind of film, beyond any sort of second-hand salaciousness or so-bad-it's-good fanboy weirdness, remains an open question: what, exactly, are they good for? Plenty, actually, if we're talking about purportedly educational documentaries like André Roosevelt and Armand Denis's *Goona Goona*, which reveals in graphic terms certain details of two separate cultures. The first, right on the surface, is Bali's society of the 1920s and early 1930s, weathering but seemingly unfazed by Dutch colonization, and still in a state largely uncorrupted by the tourism that arrived thanks to popular reports by visiting anthropologists like Margaret Mead, and to sensationalizing films like *Goona Goona*. Since Balinese daily life entailed ubiquitous female nudity—bare breasts—we also get a taste of a second culture, America in the early '30s, a naïve but restless middle-class heartland of narrow-minded churchgoers and (publicly) monogamous small-towners, modest immigrants and buttoned-down Everymen to whom a stag reel would be a freakish object, and for whom a film filled with casual tropical nudity represents a tantalizing demi-pornographic itch that they could not scratch in any other way.

That might be the most educational aspect of a film like *Goona Goona*—that it reveals an America so sheltered and limited in its experience that the film's utterly chaste visions of lovely Balinese flesh exploded in their heads as if a gloriously taboo gift from Satan. Not that Roosevelt and Denis's cobbled-up little movie can't often seem sexy; the male and female pulchritude on view is uniformly toned and young and unabashed (except when it is, on occasion, flabby and aged and unabashed). But the difference between 1932 and 2019, in terms of semi-illicit sex media, is like the difference between the telegraph and FaceTime. It's a truism we know in our bones, even if perhaps we weren't aware of it back then: the less we had at our disposal, the more electrifyingly delicious it seemed. Possessing a sense of the covert naturally helped things (as opposed to being able to muster any sexual imagery, even that produced in 1932, on our laptops in microseconds). Sometimes, consuming exploitation required a sense of secret mission. In the early '30s, barnstorming distributors like Dwain Esper and Kroger Babb (and the other so-called "Forty Thieves") leased theaters on a night by night basis, or rented out a church basement or Elks Lodge for a short run, advertised and showed their film and then got out of Dodge before the church ladies could mobilize. Films like *Goona Goona* never had wide or even official releases; if you owned a print, you'd set up a screening yourself and pocket the proceeds, before moving on to the next town or city neighborhood under the shroud of night.

Roosevelt and Denis didn't seem to have any other agenda in mind, if you take the film itself as Exhibit A. Their film is boldly exoticist, no-frills, quasi-informa-

tional, clumsily melodramatic, and most of all wide awake to naked womanhood (and girlhood, actually). Which is not to say it is entirely artless. Bali is beautifully photographable, after all, and the directors—Roosevelt, future director of *Man Hunters of the Caribbean,* and Denis of Frank Buck's *Wild Cargo* and a series of safari films—sometimes display a deft eye toward dramatic framing. The film begins as a kind of explanatory travelogue about life in Bali, from a predictably "First World" perspective (the filmmakers were French and Belgian), before quickly segueing into an entirely fictional story about a tragic love triangle centered on a princess, the narrative of which is haphazardly relayed via title cards and narration (in the sound version). Still, as pressing as the story is at times, you're never not thinking about the aw-shucks American schmoe for whom the lovely Balinese females might have been the only nude woman he'd ever seen beyond his wife.

That is, of course, unless the viewer in question was an aficionado of exploitation films, which though often advertised fleetingly and screened in unregulated circumstances, were rarely in short supply. Even movies about or featuring nude Balinese were numerous (most notorious among them was the nude-teenager-focused *Virgins of Bali*, also from 1932), and films cropped up with racy footage from Borneo, New Zealand, Hawaii, Fiji, Indochina, the Congo, and elsewhere. Nowhere was as frequented, though, as Bali, and one can only imagine what the Balinese thought as yet another gaggle of white men with cameras showed up on their shores, cornering the island's topless maidens for yet another film shoot.

At least, in the grand tradition of travel documentaries that began with the Lumière actualities filmed in North Africa and the Middle East before the turn of the century, *Goona Goona* is all shot absolutely on location. (Many of the Forty Thieves' releases were recycled archival footage, or reenactments shot on warehouse studio sets; one film that used footage shot in Cambodia, 1935's *Angkor*, augmented itself with nude Hollywood prostitutes recruited from a Selma Avenue brothel.) Bali, as it's preserved here on film, is its own glory, and the Balinese are relaxed, sweet, and, strangely, comfortable with and adept at movie acting—without, we presume, much exposure to the art form. (There are no signs of electricity

Photo courtesy of the Library of Congress

in the film's tribal life, much less any buildings that aren't villagers' huts or ancient temples.) You can scan for traces of Thai, Chinese, and Filipino culture in the Balinese traditions, but the island's generalized air of breezy tropical pre-industrialization is, as you'd expect, the primary takeaway. And all those breasts? Almost predictably, halfway through the movie their constant exposure renders them unremarkable and untantalizing, just as they are, apparently, to the Balinese themselves.

One can hardly avoid indexing Flaherty and Murnau's *Tabu* (1931), another tropical idyll that morphed from quasi-doc to outright romantic fiction, but no one has ever called *Tabu* exploitation, or even very orientalist, probably because of the respectful and poetic sensibility Murnau brought to life in Tahiti. Roosevelt and Denis, on the other hand, who were expressly taking advantage of censorship laws stating, for anthropological reasons, that "native" nudity would not be outlawed, and thus helping to establish a disreputable subgenre of sexploitation that sold so many tickets in the 1930s that the Hollywood industry and press gave the films the moniker "goona-goona epics." (Denis recounts in his memoir being "appalled" at all the crass ballyhoo surrounding the film's Times Square premiere—Goona Goona sundaes featuring two scoops of chocolate ice cream each topped with a maraschino cherry, for one—but also relished what it meant for his career: "I knew I had finally had arrived.") Money could be made by recutting and rereleasing such films, sometimes combining their footage and presenting it as something new. Typically, *Goona Goona* has had many titles, a vast variety of redubbed narrations and lost or added title cards, and an unknowable number of running times. The rumored original length of seventy minutes is lost, though the current restoration is certainly an improvement, at least from a historical perspective, over a forty-eight-minute 1942 release. Perhaps for most of us sixty-six minutes is more than enough.

Even as the 1930s ended, the phenomenon of gonna-goona epics continued unabated, driven only a few more feet underground by the Production Code through the '40s and '50s, exploiting the aggregation of social liberalism and eventually morphing into if-you-dare objects like *Mondo Cane* (1962). Only our increasing familiarity with real pornography and the postwar reality of "Third World" peoples and their cultures breaking free of colonialism slowly made the subgenre more or less obsolete. Ethnography and exploitation turned into the more responsible "witness." As scholars have been finding in the last few decades, discovering and documenting this previously reviled and forgotten leg of film history limns a kind of secret history of the 20th century, a portrait of an America compensating for its own conservative norms and imperial engagement with the world by seeking out subversion where in fact there is none—or, perhaps, by converting the world's pre-industrialized peoples into sexualized objects as a last, desperate effort to retain a sense of hegemony.

— Michael Atkinson

THE MUSICIANS

Last heard at the festival in 2013 with Henry de la Falaise's *Legong: Dance of the Virgins* (1935), also filmed in Bali, Club Foot Gamelan combines the talents of two Bay Area ensembles, Gamelan Sekar Jaya and Club Foot Orchestra, to accompany *Goona Goona: An Authentic Melodrama of the Isle of Bali.* Now celebrating its 40th anniversary, the Balinese-style Gamelan Sekar Jaya is currently under the direction of guest musician I Nyoman Windha, widely regarded as Bali's greatest living composer and the recipient of numerous international awards. Club Foot Orchestra has composed and performed for silent film since the 1980s. Together they will play a score by Club Foot Orchestra's Richard Marriott, who also conducts.

SEKAR JAYA: I Nyoman Windha (gamelan, voice), I Dewa Berata (gamelan, voice), Marianna Cherry (gamelan), Carla Fabrizio (gamelan, cello), Samuel Wantman (gamelan), Sarah Willner (gamelan, viola)
CLUB FOOT ORCHESTRA: Alisa Rose (violin), Beth Custer (clarinet), Chris Grady (trumpet), Richard Marriott (winds, conductor)

Poster image courtesy of Gaumont Pathé Archives

L'HOMME DU LARGE

MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT BY GUENTER BUCHWALD AND FRANK BOCKIUS WITH NARRATION BY PAUL MCGANN

DIRECTED BY MARCEL L'HERBIER, FRANCE, 1920
CAST Roger Karl, Jaque Catelain, Marcelle Pradot, Philippe Hériat, Claire Prélia, Suzanne Doris, Charles Boyer, Claude Autant-Lara, and Dimitri Dragomir **PRODUCTION** Gaumont Séries-Pax **PRINT SOURCE** Gaumont Pathé Archives

L'Homme du Large sits near the dawn of Marcel L'Herbier's career. The director was thirty-one and had completed three films prior, but never with the resources being offered him now. Here was his best chance yet to make a film in the Impressionist mode—testing, redefining the limits of the cinematic medium, liberating it from the old strictures of stagecraft. A film about an uncompromising man, made without compromise. That the man's path is a frustrated one would be echoed in L'Herbier's own journey, in which the compromises were many. But all of this was still to come.

L'Herbier had already led an eventful life. He'd been a sportsman, had studied literature, law, and musical composition; written plays, poetry, and criticism. He'd been shot: the consequence of a romance gone sour with dancer Marcelle Rahna. (L'Herbier recovered but lost use of a finger.) He'd served in auxiliary units in the First World War, and it was during this service that he was transferred to the Section Cinématographique de l'Armée, where he began learning the technical side of filmmaking. His first directorial credit is the propaganda piece titled *Rose-France*, released in 1919 and funded by Léon Gaumont. L'Herbier then made another film that year for Gaumont, *Le Bercail*, which marked his first collaboration with actress Marcelle Pradot, whom he later married. He began work on *Le Carnaval des Vérités* in late 1919 and *L'Homme du Large* (*Man of the Sea*) the following June.

The film industry in postwar France was short on capital, and competition from Hollywood was a major concern—so much so that the French government imposed a quota requiring one French film to be produced and shown in French theaters for every seven films imported. Yet there remained room for experimentation. Despite its literary source material—a short story by Honoré de Balzac—L'Herbier's *L'Homme du Large* is a distinctly cinematic creation, telling its story with a language beholden to no other art form.

The film is set on the Brittany coast. It is the story of Nolff (Roger Karl), a fisherman who lives with his wife, daughter, and son in a secluded home, far from the temptations of the city. Nolff is stiff-necked and devout, more at home on the water than around most people. He worships the ocean for its bounty and purity and sees in his son Marcel (Jaque Catelain) his natural successor. Yet Marcel is a reprobate, drawn to the town and its pleasures. It is Nolff's daughter, Djenna (Marcelle Pradot), who inherits her father's rectitude. If only he could see it.

Cinematography, editing, and production design in *L'Homme du Large* achieve effects that could never exist on the stage or page, serving to sharpen essential qualities and emotional states. An early intertitle describes Nolff in a typeface recalling carved stone. Intertitles concerning Marcel feature a swirling background, while those about Djenna depict tidy gardens. L'Herbier's dramatic wipes, irises in and out, and masking techniques emphasize certain characters or their actions, or draw from already powerful landscapes something more precise. In one early scene he masks a cliffside into the shape of a cross,

surrounding it with words, making it both shot and intertitle. Later he masks the rocks into a "V," while, at the top of the screen we see a woman strolling. It's almost as though she's headed for a steep-sided pit. To see these effects on screen is a reminder that they could be seen nowhere else.

Even *L'Homme du Large*'s less experimental moments distinguish it from the theater. The film has many scenes in which characters look into the distance—to a windmill, for example, or to other people, strolling by the water far below. In a key moment we see Nolff approaching the gates of a jail, which dwarf him in a way difficult to duplicate in a playhouse. One intertitle features a filmed inset of a character surrounded by the words she's speaking. In another Nolff's wife, introverted and unwell, is surrounded by footage of revelers. She really is among them, but by presenting her this way, the director emphasizes her loneliness and isolation. L'Herbier's mixture of media, time, and space in this shot goes far beyond what can be done onstage—announcing, loudly, the expressive potential of film.

L'Homme du Large was a critical success. It led to four more L'Herbier-Gaumont pairings, among them *El Dorado* (1921), another silent-era triumph. But the director was ready to chart his own course. He founded his own production company, Cinégraphic, and in 1924 released *L'Inhumaine*, probably his best-known silent work outside of France. A tenuously plotted, fantastical mishmash of progressive art styles, *L'Inhumaine* drew upon collaborators from the worlds of architecture and design, composition, dance, and fashion (Pound, Picasso, Nijinsky, and Joyce were among the notable creatives serving as extras.) L'Herbier used his film to elevate new art of all kinds, something few people would have had the ambition, or indeed the connections, to try.

Marcelle Pradot, Roger Karl, Jaque Catelain. Photo courtesy of Gaumont Pathé Archives

Cinégraphic struggled financially, and neither artistic vision nor a collaborative spirit were enough to save it. The company's last release was *L'Argent* (1928), a vast and gripping film about finance and corruption. Though in some respects more conventional than *L'Homme du Large* or *L'Inhumaine*, it was also more accessible—a worthy end to the most celebrated phase of L'Herbier's career.

Cinégraphic's demise was followed shortly by the arrival of sound. L'Herbier's *L'Enfant de l'Amour* (1930), was the first fully talking picture made in a French studio, but he was dissatisfied with it, and, like many silent-era luminaries, his work in the 1930s proved undistinguished. (Arguably, the director's most significant contribution to film during this time was not an artistic one. During filming of 1934's *Le Bonheur*, he was struck by a camera and lost sight in one eye. L'Herbier successfully sued the producer, leading to the first instance in French law of a director being recognized as an author of his own work, rather than simply an employee.)

It was the so-called "Cinema of Paradox" that gave the aging master a chance to shine again. Along with many other French directors (Abel Gance and Henri-Georges Clouzot among them), L'Herbier worked under the Vichy government, directing several features, including the acclaimed *La Nuit Fantastique* (1942), a movie recalling his 1920s heyday. Reflecting years later on a screening of the film, he wrote: "… I felt rejuvenated. I was certain that my old-time critics would be there. And I was even more certain that I had managed to attract these indulgent connoisseurs who, faced with the artfulness of such a tale, feel their love of cinema begin to blossom." It was the closest he'd come in years to making the kind of film he loved.

With Liberation came, ironically, a return to the status quo. For L'Herbier there would be no more films like *L'Inhumaine* or *La Nuit Fantastique* and, after 1953, no more features at all. He turned instead to television, seeing its potential as a tool for mass education and used his status as an established filmmaker to elevate the medium where he could. He appeared on French TV frequently, often speaking on the subject of film. He also served a lengthy tenure as president of L'Institut des Hautes Études Cinématographiques (the Institute for Advanced Cinematographic Studies, now La Fémis), a film school he founded in Paris. He died in 1979, aged ninety-one.

"What the [French Impressionists] had in common was a desire to forge a 'pure cinema,'" writes English film critic Charles Drazin, "observing its own rules, free from the undermining conventions of the theatre." L'Herbier's silent films brought this impulse to life. However, freedom from convention requires freedom of choice, and so it is to this first, sparkling portion of L'Herbier's long career that movie lovers most often turn. He was at home in those years, like Nolff upon the ocean waves—the city distant, forgettable, but inescapable.

— Chris Edwards

ABOUT THE NARRATOR

Actor of stage, screen, and television Paul McGann made his film debut opposite Richard Grant in the cult movie *Withnail and I* and has since forged a singular path, creating unforgettable characters in films like Ken Russell's *The Rainbow* and David Fincher's *Alien 3*. McGann was the eighth incarnation of the title character of BBC's *Doctor Who* and has a recurring role in the current crime drama *Luther*. His unmistakable voice has graced documentaries for the British broadcaster and he lends it today to narrate the English translation of intertitles for both *L'Homme du Large* and *L'Inferno* (see page 96).

Down to the Sea in Films

by MONICA NOLAN

The sea has exerted a tidal pull on filmmakers ever since cinema's beginnings, offering a recognizable—if ever-shifting—thematic shorthand, suggesting, in turn, nature at its most savage and unconquerable, most spiritually purifying, or most mysteriously other.

A Man There Was

1917 Victor Sjöström's adaption of Ibsen's epic poem *Terje Vigen* sets the template for what has become a familiar movie hero, the man of the sea. He's more at home on water than land. He's tossed about by the dangerous currents and whirlpools of civilization. He's impulsive yet pure of heart. Sjöström also establishes a visual language for the seafaring film, with its pounding surf, barren rocks, and grizzled seafarers clambering around the deck in rough-knit sweaters and rakish caps (reams could be written on the sartorial significance of sailor costuming). For this Norwegian sailor whose wife and child die of starvation when he is captured by a British naval ship during the Napoleonic wars, the sea is both purifier and place of penance. Opening with a stunning shot of an older Terje looking out at crashing waves framed by a window, the film also establishes the seaman's essential solitude and the borderland he inhabits, caught between land and ocean, civilization and nature.

The Navigator

1924 Buster Keaton opens his comical spin on the lost-at-sea story à la *A Man There Was*, with a window framing the sea. This time, however, there's a group of men around it (the spies whose machinations set the plot in motion) and the focus is the ocean liner of the title. Keaton's rich innocent is set adrift aboard the vessel, empty except for Betsy (an Olive Oyl-like Kathryn McGuire), the girl who recently rejected his marriage proposal. The solitude of the sea is played for laughs, as the two scurry around the vast ship, each searching for and always missing the other. In this version of Nature vs. Civilization, the ship is a kind of man-made desert island, and Keaton and his girl an inventive Swiss Family Robinson, adapting to the outsize scale of their new home with a slew of jerry-rigged devices. Their modus operandi is to treat the lonely ocean as if it were Main Street—Keaton even sets up a "men at work" sign during a jaunt to the ocean's floor. The pair is eventually downsized to a canoe, then a life preserver, and finally they sink below the waves, only to be lifted back up by a submarine. But as in most seafaring movies, the ocean's purifying force has had its effect—Keaton gets a kiss from his girl in the final frame and sends the sub spinning.

Docks of New York

1928 Josef von Sternberg's moody, romantic melodrama exists entirely in the borderland between land and sea, savagery and civilization. Its setting is the Sandbar, a sailor's cabaret, "a cable's length from the wharf," in a world of fog, shanties, and watery reflections. Sailor and girl meet cute when he fishes her out of the drink one desperate night (the soaked woman in a faint appears in the first two movies as well). Stoker Bill, the sailor, is less independent waterman than he is peon in the bowels of a big ship like the *Navigator*, but his untamed innocence and boastful claim that "no power on earth can keep me ashore" make him a worthy heir to a wild young Terje Vigen. Mae, the waterfront bargirl, is hardly more domestic, as much in need of civilizing as Bill. After the rescue, a bond grows between these twin outcasts, both teetering between innocence and corruption. Like the marauding cannibals of *The Navigator*, the Sandbar's denizens threaten to pull the couple under, and it's the purifying power of the sea that saves them. "Make believe you died, make believe you're starting all over again," Bill tells Mae after her suicide attempt. At the end of the film he, too, performs a self-baptism, diving off his ship to swim back to the girl he left behind and to a new life.

The Great White Silence

1924 Herbert Ponting's documentary of Robert Falcon Scott's tragic South Pole expedition was intended to celebrate men who left the borderland behind, who crossed the sea to conquer nature at its most savage and then returned to civilization victorious. Alas, nature did not cooperate and the resulting film is schizophrenic; the frequent intertitles—touting the film's own camerawork and the explorers' pluck—tell one tale, the astonishing visuals another. As the *Terra Nova*'s voyage begins, viewers are treated to shots of a crowded New Zealand harbor, intercut with sailors entertaining each other by sparring and dancing jigs. But after the ship steams away from the piers, humans disappear from the footage to be replaced by icebergs, glaciers, and distant volcanoes. The long takes of the iron-sheathed bow cutting through the frozen sea are so hypnotic, the glacial caves so awe-inspiring that when the crew does reappear the effect is jarring. The men play with cats or engage in a soccer game, and these attempts at normalcy, comic in *The Navigator*, strike a discordant note. Most of the human action was painstakingly staged because of the technical demands of filming in subzero weather, yet occasional moments of realism break through—men's faces blackened with frostbite, or trudging figures hauling loaded sleds. There is no footage of Scott's doomed trek inland, but the shot of a dwindling sled disappearing into a sea of whiteness is an ominous portent.

Erich von Stroheim and Fay Wray. Photo courtesy of Film Forum

THE WEDDING MARCH

MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT BY MONT ALTO MOTION PICTURE ORCHESTRA

DIRECTED BY ERICH VON STROHEIM, USA, 1928
CAST Erich von Stroheim, Fay Wray, ZaSu Pitts, George Fawcett, Maude George, George Nichols, Hughie Mack, Matthew Betz, Cesare Gravina, Dale Fuller, and Sidney Bracey **PRODUCTION** Paramount Famous Lasky Corp. **PRINT SOURCE** Paramount Pictures

Few people in the history of Hollywood have been as revered and reviled as Erich von Stroheim. Among studio magnates like Irving Thalberg, Stroheim's inability or unwillingness to deliver a film at a usable length anywhere near on budget made him a hated burden. But the undeniable power of his cinematic vision and his charismatic personality made his movies enormously appealing to audiences and critics alike. His career was a succession of dazzling successes as well as misunderstood, unreleaseable projects hacked to pieces by studios whose idea of a film was 90 to 120 minutes long and bled black ink, not red.

Stroheim came to America from his native Austria, arriving at Ellis Island in 1909 at age twenty-four, where this son of a Jewish hatmaker changed his name to the aristocratic-sounding Erich Oswald Hans Carl Maria von Stroheim, inventing a past for himself as an Austrian nobleman with a distinguished military career. He came to the Bay Area for awhile, living in Mill Valley and Oakland, pondering his life path, then moved to Los Angeles, where he caught on as a Swiss army knife who happened to be an expert on European aristocratic and military matters. His first jobs were as an actor in small but noticeable parts and, in 1914, as an advisor to D.W. Griffith, whom he always considered to be his mentor.

"Throughout his career, he was able to talk people into almost anything," writes biographer Richard Koszarski, and, in 1919, Stroheim talked his way into directing and starring in his first film, *Blind Husbands*, at Universal where noted penny-pincher Carl Laemmle was willing to gamble on anybody with a good idea who didn't need to be paid too much. The film was a smashing success, critically and commercially. In one stroke Stroheim established himself as the most sophisticated filmmaker in Hollywood.

Stroheim was notorious for his lavishness and extravagant staging, with an obsessive attention to the intricate details of costumes and set design. He went to the set with an approved script but felt no hesitation in creating new scenes as he went, oblivious to running time or expense. In the case of *Greed*, this work style resulted in an eight-hour final cut. Naturally, this led to a studio butchering of the print to two hours, which made the film incomprehensible and assured its failure with audience and critics. But his methods were not driven by incompetence or ignorance. They were conscious choices. He was creating a new kind of cinema.

"My single aim in directing a picture is to give plausibility to the picture," he said in a newspaper interview when quizzed about his extravagant production methods. "I try to make the members of the cast live their parts, be the characters that they are playing … It is because I forbid theatricality, refuse to allow them to act all over the place, that they become natural and interpret their roles by living." That plausibility involved meticulous attention not only to building characters but also to the sets and costumes they inhabited.

More than once Stroheim lost control of a picture before it was finished. His sixth film as director, *The*

A VINDICATION OF STROHEIM'S APPROACH TO REALISM

Merry Widow, was thought to be his last chance to show that he could play by the rules. But it fared no better than the others. He was thrown off it by MGM in an attempt to stem the bleeding. But in a stunning reversal of fortune, instead of losing money, *The Merry Widow* became his greatest commercial and critical success.

The major studios professed to be through with him, but an independent producer, Pat Powers, stepped up to make a deal in conjunction with Paramount. Stroheim would write an original story, direct, and star. The project was to be titled *The Wedding March*, a romantic drama set once again in the twilight of the Hapsburg dynasty in pre-World War I Vienna, as most of his films were.

The Wedding March is a vindication of Stroheim's approach to realism. Without the crowd scenes, the lavish celebrations and costumes, the establishing of the decadent lifestyle of the aristocracy, the emotional punch at the end of the story would not be so strong. The story centers around Prince Nicki (Erich von Stroheim), the son of a noble family who has been living the life of a cynical libertine and is now in financial straits. When he goes to his father, Prince Ottokar (George Fawcett), for money, Ottokar tells Nicki that he has nothing. He advises his son to "marry money" and save the whole family.

At the Corpus Christi religious parade in front of St. Stephen's Cathedral, the dashing Nicki, on horseback in his cavalry commander's finery, notices a beautiful young woman, Mitzi (Fay Wray), in the crowd. They exchange meaningful glances, even though she is with the loutish Schani (Matthew Betz), who has designs on marrying her. After a disturbance, Nicki has Schani arrested, and the mutual hatred and jealousy between them is ignited. But Nicki and Mitzi keep meeting under romantic circumstances and fall in love.

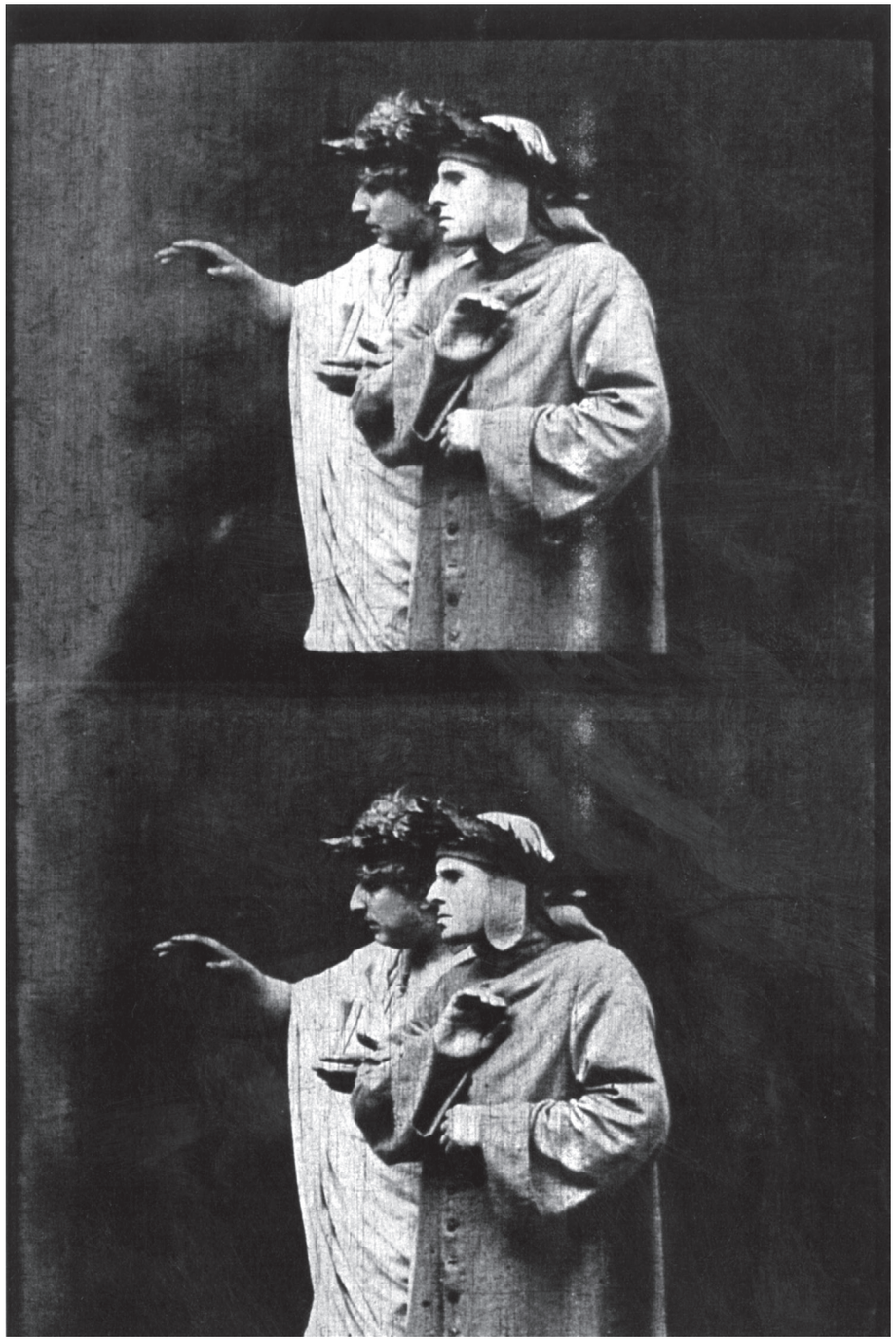
Nicki is approached by a wealthy capitalist to marry his daughter Cecelia (ZaSu Pitts): a million-dollar dowry in exchange for a noble title for her. Nicki initially refuses but finally relents; it is his duty as a nobleman to save the family from humiliation. When Schani is released from jail he angrily tells Mitzi what a fool she is to harbor illusions of marrying a nobleman. He plans to kill Nicki at the elaborate royal wedding. He waits for Nicki with a gun outside the church. Mitzi promises to marry Schani if he refrains from his attempt to kill Nicki. Oblivious to all this, Nicki and Cecelia get into their coach and drive away as he wipes a tear from his eye. The pain in his heart is understated but obvious.

The casting was easy, as Stroheim turned to actors he had been working with for years. In the role of Cecelia he cast Pitts, a comedienne already known for her goofy persona whom he had turned into a dramatic leading lady in *Greed*. And of course he cast himself in the lead role, Prince Nicki. The one role that remained difficult to fill was that of Mitzi. After seeing hundreds of candidates, he instantly connected with Wray. At the age of eighteen, she had the unspoiled starry-eyed beauty he was looking for. It was her breakthrough part and led to a notable career.

From the beginning Stroheim was thinking of a two-part film: *The Wedding March*, which would end at the wedding, and *The Honeymoon*, which continued the story. Stroheim's extravagance was, as always, legendary. He had a reproduction built of the Vienna cathedral. For a romantic scene in which Nicki and Mitzi meet in a luminous apple orchard at night, he had thousands of apple blossoms tied by hand to the trees. An orgy scene among the aristocrats was enhanced by call girls and bootleg gin brought onto the set; the shooting went nonstop for days. It was no surprise that Stroheim's cut ran to six hours. Powers took the film away from him and, after a series of misfortunes, it was made into two films after all, both of them unsuccessful. (The only known surviving print of *The Honeymoon* was lost in a fire at the Cinémathèque Française in 1959.)

The Wedding March is perhaps Stroheim's most personal film. In an interview with *Hollywood Filmograph* magazine he said, "*The Wedding March* is an expression of my own homesickness, the nostalgia of one who revives dear memories with a catch in his throat and a pain in his heart."

— Miguel Pendás



L'INFERNO

MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT BY THE MATTI BYE ENSEMBLE WITH NARRATION BY PAUL MCGANN

DIRECTED BY FRANCESCO BERTOLINI, ADOLFO PADOVAN, AND GIUSEPPE DE LIGUORO, ITALY, 1911
CAST Salvatore Papa, Arturo Pirovano, Giuseppe De Liguoro, Attilio Motta, Emilise Beretta, and A. Milla
PRODUCTION Milano Films **PRINT SOURCE** Cineteca di Bologna

With its horned demons, headless specters, and winged harpies, 1911's *L'Inferno* revels in the grotesque, the feudal, and the macabre. Like a fairy tale gone wrong, or a Hieronymus Bosch painting set in motion, the canonical work of Italy's early silent era infused biblical subject matter with fantasy, the Gothic, and the delightfully obscene. Featuring heretics, adulterers, gluttons, and misers, with cameos from the vixens of antiquity—Cleopatra, Helen of Troy, and Dido—*L'Inferno*'s preponderance of naked flesh (reportedly featuring the first ever scene of full-frontal male nudity) was about as lascivious as early silent film came. Yet, for all its sensationalism and carnality, Milano Films' production of the first cantica of Dante Alighieri's *The Divine Comedy* legitimized cinema as a "seventh art," both in Italy and abroad. Flaunting impressive special effects, extraordinary production design, and costing an unheard-of 100,000 lire, *L'Inferno* was truly the first super-production—an international blockbuster running some three hours long, making it the second feature-length film in cinema history after Australia's *The Story of the Kelly Gang* in 1906. And while only a third of that runtime survives, *L'Inferno*, under the direction of Francesco Bertolini, Giuseppe De Liguoro, and Dante expert Adolfo Padovan, endures as one of the era's most intriguing and entertaining literary adaptations.

Italy's film industry was relatively nascent when *L'Inferno* went into production in 1909. While cinema flourished in France, Germany, Denmark, and the United Kingdom, Italy arrived to the scene relatively late—it wasn't until 1903, some seven years after the Lumières debuted their cinematograph in Rome and Milan, that a national industry began to take shape. The release of Filoteo Alberini's *The Capture of Rome* in 1905 is largely regarded as the first distinctly Italian narrative film, and from there the industry blossomed, led by the country's major studios, Cines, Ambrosio Film, Itala Film, and Milano Films founded in 1908. By 1911, Italian film production was fervent—with three titles released each day. Harnessing Dante's international renown proved a sound strategy as Italy's reputation for quality films spread around the globe, ushering in a golden age of Italian silent production, with the likes of *The Last Days of Pompeii* (1913), *Cabiria* (1914), and *Assunta Spina* (1915) soon to follow.

Considered one of the foremost artists of the Late Middle Ages, the Florentine Dante was proudly celebrated as Italy's national bard and his *Divine Comedy*, completed a year prior to his 1321 death, adapted for a variety of media throughout the centuries. The paintings of Sandro Botticelli, the sculptures of Auguste Rodin, the musical compositions of Franz Liszt, and the watercolors of poet William Blake are just a few Dante-inspired works. It is no wonder then, that the nascent industry looked to its country's most bona fide cultural export to legitimize film as a high art. Milano Films' production, which premiered in Naples on March 1, 1911, was just one of eleven films released in Italy between 1908 and 1911 based on the works of Dante or inspired by his life (the Helios studio rushed their inferior and much

Arturo Pirovano and Salvatore Papa. Image courtesy of Cineteca di Bologna

shorter version of *L'Inferno* into production to beat Milano Films by two months). Further, at a time when the Vicar of Rome forbade priests from entering movie houses for fear of cinema's penchant for the lurid, not even the Church could object to such sacred subject matter. Its graphic and mesmerizing depictions of Hell and Purgatory, with bodies torn limb from limb, the devouring of souls by gargantuan beasts, and heretics burning in lakes of boiling pitch, upheld Catholic doctrine. Indeed, to attract believers to the film's release in the United States, *Moving Picture World* published an exaggerated, if not apocryphal, testimonial to the film's persuasiveness, reporting that a lawyer jumped up in the middle of a screening confessing aloud to being a sinner.

Dante's descriptions of the nine circles of Hell informed visual art, in particular painting, throughout the Renaissance and beyond. Both Salvatore Papa and Arturo Pirovano were cast in the film for their respective resemblances to Dante and Virgil in art. And while *Moving Picture World*'s W. Stephen Bush imagined the filmmakers sitting "at [Dante's] feet like docile scholars," in truth, Bertolini, Padovan, and De Liguoro followed the visual cues of French artist Gustave Doré whose engravings illustrate an 1857 edition of *The Divine Comedy*. The directors effectively distilled Doré's vision of winged demons, the horned Pluto, and pestering Furies for the movie screen, adding an alluring color scheme to the famed artist's black-and-white renderings—deep indigo for Pluto's eerie, icy realm, fiery reds for the suffering of burning souls, and a golden tone for the heavenly realm. For Doré's cavernous crags of rock and rivers of filth, the production shot on location in Milan's neighboring lake district. Technical director Emilio Ronsardo balanced each of Hell's nine circles with a bravado indebted to the trick films of Georges Méliès, making the most of superimpositions, double, triple, and even quadruple exposures. Under Ronsardo's skilled hand, *L'Inferno* became a medieval painting in ballet form—carnal souls violently flung about by Hell's gusting winds in an impressive use of multilayered superimpositions. In this, *L'Inferno* not only distinguished film from the theater with its baroque, lavish visuals, it also married special-effects laden Bible stories with box-office success—a

marriage that prospered well into the late silent era and beyond, in particular with the super-productions of Cecil B. DeMille to come.

Released in the U.S. by Monopol Films, *L'Inferno* garnered praise for making Dante "intelligible to the masses," from perhaps the film's greatest state-side booster who also went on tour with the film. Like his Italian counterparts, W. Stephen Bush had been using the pages of *Moving Picture World* to advocate for not only longer films but films adapted from classical works. When *L'Inferno* came out he couldn't say enough good about it, encouraging exhibitors to book it and, presumably, engage him to lecture on it. "The immortal work," he asserted, "whose beauties until now were accessible only to a small band of scholars, has now after a sleep of more than six centuries become the property of mankind." *L'Inferno*'s Italian publicity campaign had been even more extravagant. Launched by Milano Films' producer Gustavo Lombardo—the editor of *Lux* film magazine and future founder of the stalwart Italian studio Lombardo Film—the film was teased some four months prior to its premiere, an unusual practice for the period. Impersonating Dante in his magazine, Lombardo claims to have been given the bard's highest approval for the film, lending *L'Inferno* legitimacy, even if contrived.

A landmark in so many ways, *L'Inferno* predicted the ingredients to mega-blockbuster success of the future—targeted publicity, elaborate production design, astounding special effects, and above all, entertainment. It effectively launched the narrative art film, luring intellectuals and artists to its premiere at the Regio Teatro Mercadante in Naples. Declaring it a triumph, respected novelist and intellectual heavy-weight Matilde Serao claimed that *L'Inferno* "rehabilitated the cinematograph." Today, the more than century-old film still reads as fresh. Like the appeal of Méliès, *L'Inferno* offers unparalleled visuals that transcend curiosity or nostalgia—like a restorative tonic, its eternally appealing subject matter and style is proof positive of Italy's immense contribution to the history of film.

— Alicia Fletcher

Photos courtesy of Cineteca di Bologna

DEMONIC VISIONS

When Silents Go to the Devil

by Nora Fiore

From rollicking adventures to cinematic sermons, silent film portrayals of Hell and Satan sizzle with innovation, dark spectacle, and insight into the shadowy side of human nature.

MERRY FROLICS OF SATAN

Cinema's earliest depictions of the Devil and his netherworld intermingle humor, horror, and wonder. A vehicle for the Dark One's spells and conjurings, Méliès's *Le Manoir du Diable* revels in the power of film as a kind of black magic. In *Le Cake-walk Infernal*, demons in Hell learn the popular dance, which Mephistopheles drolly exaggerates by detaching his legs and arms. Méliès's unsettling *Les Quatre-cents Farces du Diable* ends on a note of revulsion. After an awe-inspiring tour of the heavens in a skeleton-horse-drawn carriage, a mortal is dragged to Hell where demons roast him like a pig. Lépine's *Le Fils du Diable Fait la Noce à Paris* centers a romantic comedy on the Devil's son, sent to Paris to cure his melancholy. He departs in style, chauffeured by a goblin, as sparkler-waving demons illuminate Hell's catacombs. Humor arises from the accessibility of Lépine's Hell—reachable by automobile and telephone—and the normalcy of Satan's family unit: bourgeois parents fussing over their spoiled son. In Segundo de Chomón's *Le Spectre Rouge*, a horned skeleton emerges from a fiery coffin to show off his sorcery. Most memorably, he inches creepily toward the camera, offering a closer look at his collection of bottled women. Jewel-toned, stencil-colored infernal trappings, like purple stalactites, red flames, and golden smoke, enhance the film's thrilling illusions.

TO HELL AND BACK

Special effects pioneered in trick films enabled feature films to recreate Hell as imagined by Dante. *L'Inferno*'s filmmakers emulate Gustave Doré's engravings and sometimes magnify their horror. An illustration of a mutilated soul holding its own head is disturbing, but the equivalent on film, with a thrashing, screaming decapitated head, is much more shocking. Whereas Doré depicts Satan as a sinister bulk in the distance, *L'Inferno* captures him up close, as he shoves perfidious souls into his abysmal mouth. Fox's big-budget 1924 film *Dante's Inferno* cuts between two plot lines: a contemporary businessman destroying lives and Dante's journey. Glistening shots of sadistic demons brutalizing naked souls and writhing bodies scalded by boiling pitch might give anyone pause to reevaluate their life choices. Indeed, as the ruthless slumlord reads Dante, infernal visions bleed into his reality. After a smirking devil materializes by his desk, the tycoon has an elaborate nightmare—ending with demons casting him into a steaming pit—and vows to change his ways.

Though not based on Dante, Guido Brigone's *Maciste all'Inferno* remixes the poem's imagery and weighty spiritual stakes with a proto-superhero, a tongue-in-cheek tone, and eye-popping film tricks. In the 1925 installment of his popular series, muscle-bound champion Maciste thwarts the Devil's minions on Earth, so vengeful Pluto beams him to Hell. There he tangles with temptresses who transmogrify him into a shaggy demon and he fights off legions of fallen angels. The action-packed fantasy abounds with wild, often whimsical spectacle, from crowded fight scenes to supernatural phenomena, like a flying dragon and a demon's face that rebuilds itself courtesy of stop-motion after Maciste punches it in.

LOVE AND DAMNATION

In Nino Oxilia's *Rapsodia Satanica* and F.W. Murnau's *Faust*, Mephistopheles dangles the promise of youth to ensnare protagonists' souls. Murnau etches stark images reminiscent of medieval woodcuts to suggest the tug-of-war between higher aspirations and unholy lusts. Oxilia floods the screen with sensual temptations, heightened by an astonishing mixture of added color. Flowers, reflective surfaces, luxurious furnishings, textured decorations, and Borelli's sumptuous costumes seem all the more tantalizing and alive with stencil-added shades of crimson, violet, green, and rose. While Faust's capacity for love defeats the Devil, love lures *Rapsodia*'s heroine to her doom. At the conclusion of *Faust*, Murnau reverses the symbolism of flames by turning a scene of fiery execution into a glowing miracle of redemption. Throwing himself onto Gretchen's pyre, Faust proves his love and escapes the fires of damnation. Smoke rises around the lovers and they ascend to heaven in a ball of light. *Rapsodia Satanica*'s Alba also risks everything to reunite with her lover. In a kaleidoscopic shot awash in pink, she adorns herself with gauzy veils before a mirror. As she floats toward her assignation through a breeze-kissed verdigris courtyard, she transforms into an angel, a priestess, a phantom, and a bride all at once. Yet when Alba reaches out to embrace her lover, Mephistopheles sweeps her up in his purplish-red cape. In a bitter echo of the earlier mirror shot, he shows Alba her aged reflection in a gazing pool as she dies. The heady erotic buildup is consummated in despair and decay, evoking the intertwined ethos at the heart of the diva film: desire and damnation, beauty and death.

MIDNIGHT TRAIN TO HADES

Eloyce and James Gist's *Hellbound Train* from 1930 puts a 20th-century twist on the Dantesque litany of sins. Intended to be shown at black churches and social gatherings, this independently produced film tallies vices, from jazz to murder, through the metaphor of different cars on a train. Like a visual call-and-response after each sin, intertitles note "the devil rejoices" and a caped Satan dances. Though the train derails into hellfire, the majority of the film's horrors belong to the mortal realm. A child smokes her neglectful mother's cigarette and sips her cocktail. A young girl sells herself to the bootlegger who defrauded her father. A man asked to help an inebriated woman rapes her instead. Handheld shots and jump cuts intensify the film's dizzying sense of lives spinning tragically out of control. The Gists' vignettes suggest that the most terrifying version of Hell is the one that humans unleash here on Earth.

JAPANESE GIRLS AT THE HARBOR

MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT BY GUENTER BUCHWALD AND SASCHA JACOBSEN

DIRECTED BY HIROSHI SHIMIZU, JAPAN, 1933
CAST Michiko Oikawa, Yukiko Inoue, Ureo Egawa, Tatsuo Saito, Ranko Sawa, Yumeko Aizome, and Yasuo Nanjo **PRODUCTION** Shochiku **PRINT SOURCE** National Film Archive of Japan

When Hiroshi Shimizu released *Japanese Girls at the Harbor* in 1933, the veteran filmmaker had already made more than eighty-five films. When he died in 1966, he had at least 160 films to his credit in a thirty-five-year career, most of them made at Shochiku, also the home of his friend and colleague Yasujiro Ozu. In his time Shimizu was both a popular director and a respected filmmaker, but after his death he was practically forgotten, even in his home country. He was born in 1903, the same year as Ozu, yet after the glorious celebration of Ozu's centenary with a near-complete touring retrospective in Japan, Shimizu received a belated "101st Anniversary" celebration at the 2004 Hong Kong International Film Festival, an afterthought, showcasing a mere thirteen films.

Why? Access is certainly a factor. Only a fraction of his films survive, even fewer are available on home video, and his work is rarely revived outside of Japan. Another reason may be a reputation that stuck as a director of light entertainment after his series of children's films that he began making in the late 1930s. "Shimizu's world is a sunny one, where the sadness of things only rarely intrudes," wrote Alan Stanbrook after a 1988 retrospective at London's National Film Theatre, the first to showcase the director in the West. And then there was the reductive public persona that remained long after the films receded from the public.

Born the son of an international businessman with American ties, Shimizu grew up wealthy and drifted into filmmaking after dropping out of college. He apprenticed at Shochiku, making his directorial debut in 1924 at twenty-one years of age. In Stanbrook's pioneering essay on Shimizu, he found biographical information on Shimizu not merely sketchy but contradictory. He had a reputation for indolence, yet was remarkably prolific, releasing as many as a dozen films a year in the 1920s. Off screen, the independently wealthy filmmaker earned a reputation as a playboy and a womanizer while making movies empathetic to the outcast, the marginalized, and the powerless. His often melancholy films about the plight of children failed by the adult world were among his biggest hits and earned him a reputation as a director of children's films; he funded a home for children orphaned by the war after World War II with his own money, which only underlined the public assumptions. Yet they are only one dimension of a career filled with romantic dramas, social comedies, character pieces, and stories of outsiders traveling the back roads and visiting the small towns and vacation spots of rural Japan.

Japanese Girls at the Harbor (*Minato no Nihon Musume*), one of only a handful of Shimizu's surviving silent films, further belies the clichés. It shows a mature, sophisticated artist and showcases both his social conscience and his stylistic innovation. The filmmaker takes a melodramatic story involving jealousy, violence, and a spiral from schoolgirl to dance hall girl, and creates a lovely character piece about two friends in the port city of Yokohama who reconnect as adults after their lives take radically different paths. There are resonances with both Kenji Mizoguchi, Japan's cinematic patron saint of fallen women, and the socially conscious silent films of Ozu, at least

Yumeko Aizome and Michiko Oikawa. Photo courtesy of Janus Films

Yukiko Inoue and Michiko Oikawa. Photo courtesy of Janus Films

in the subject matter. But while Shimizu shares his compatriots' compassion for these characters, he has his own way of telling stories.

Like many of Shimizu's films, *Japanese Girls at the Harbor* is built on a journey, a transition through the world as the two girls of the title grow up. As Stanbrook notes, he often took the cameras out of the studios to shoot his productions on location, preferred to work from outlines rather than finished scripts, and drew inspiration from his shooting locations. Next to the formal compositions of Ozu or the complex mise-en-scène of Mizoguchi, Shimizu's images are airy and uncluttered and, in many cases, framed to encompass the natural beauty of rural locations or the energy of urban settings. He stages key shots in depth and uses a fluid camera to follow his characters as they move through their environments. In contrast to the tragedies of Mizoguchi's tales of fallen women, Shimizu offers optimism in the personal journeys of his two Japanese girls. Perhaps this accounts for Stanbrook's comment on the "sunny" worldview.

The opening scenes convey innocence and yearning. Sunako (Michiko Oikawa, a compelling young actress who died of tuberculosis at the tragically young age of twenty-six) and best friend Dora (Yukiko Inoue) walk home from their Catholic school, leaving the urban landscape of Yokohama for the natural beauty of the port city's surrounding hills and forests. The girls are dwarfed by the enormity of the world around them as they look down on the harbor from their perch on cliffs above the city, wistfully watching the ships carry others off to adventures elsewhere. This idyll between best friends, who pledge eternal loyalty while protected in their own little Eden, is broken when motorcycle-riding bad boy Henry (Ureo Egawa) roars through a nearby meadow and a smitten Sunako runs off to join him. As the girls drift apart, the gentle traveling shots and lovely images framed through trees give way to an urban drama of recklessness and jealousy with starker images and more rapid editing, culminating in a startling use of jump cuts to punctuate a moment of violence and shattered innocence.

That stylistic rupture stands out from a film built on recurring patterns and mirrored shots and sequences, but *Japanese Girls at the Harbor* is filled with poetic touches and imaginative storytelling choices. For instance, a ball of yarn unwinds and wraps around the legs of an oblivious couple dancing through the living room of Dora's middle-class home—a charming metaphor for an intrusion into a well-ordered life. Shimizu's evocative use of dissolves not only signify the passing of time but also transform character exits into literal disappearing acts, fading out from the image as if evaporating on screen. The effect is subtle but affecting, suggesting an absence beyond a mere exit as Sunako and Henry meet again years later and are suddenly left alone in a scene of discomforting intimacy.

Like Ozu, Shimizu seems to be well versed in Hollywood movies and international cinema of the day, but his affection for America and the rest of Western culture appears to end there. Yokohama is a gateway to the outside world and hosts its own foreign settlement. Shimizu emphasizes the gulf between the city, where the girls attend a Catholic school, and their homes in the wooded hills above. Tensions between Japanese and Western values run through the film, from dress codes (sailor-cut schoolgirl uniforms and Western-style dresses versus traditional robes and kimonos) to Dora and Henry's neat little household. Furnished with overstuffed chairs and standing lamps and artwork hanging on sturdy walls, it looks far more like the middle-class homes in American movies than the traditional homes of tatami mats and rooms divided by shoji (sliding doors of latticework wood frames covered in white paper) familiar to us from Ozu's films. It is telling that the film's startling act of violence occurs within a Catholic church in the international district.

A recognizable face from Ozu silent comedies *Tokyo Chorus* and *I Was Born, But…*, Tatsuo Saito plays the fourth strand of this romantic tangle, a desolate bohemian painter who attaches himself to Sunako. To him she's part muse and part patron as he lives off her wages and follows her from city to city, lazily devoting his art to unending portraits of her. Another of Shimizu's outsiders, he's largely an observer in other ways, passive and domestic (Shimizu shows him doing laundry dutifully and perhaps even contentedly), but even so he makes his own journey in the margins of her story.

In the last two decades Hiroshi Shimizu's films have been getting a critical assessment in English, courtesy of William Drew, Alexander Jacoby, David Bordwell, and a few others. However, there is very little available on his life and career published in the English language, and what survives of his work is still little seen. There's so much more to learn and, on the strength of *Japanese Girls at the Harbor* alone, plenty of reason to do so. Shimizu carries us through a packed plot with such grace that it never feels overstuffed. It demonstrates his eye for lyrical images and a fluency for expressing the desires and regrets of his characters through evocative compositions. And through all the anxiety and tragedy and hardship, he still embraces an optimistic vision. His Japanese girls confront the sadness and disappointments of their lives and emerge stronger, perhaps a little wiser, and ready to chart a new course forward.

— Sean Axmaker

THE HOME MAKER

MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT BY STEPHEN HORNE

DIRECTED BY KING BAGGOT, USA, 1925
CAST Alice Joyce, Clive Brook, Billy Kent Schaeffer, George Fawcett, Virginia Boardman, Maurice Murphy, Jacqueline Wells, Frank Newburg, Margaret Campbell, and Martha Mattox **PRODUCTION** Universal-Jewel
PRINT SOURCE UCLA Film and Television Archive

Contemporary critics had a hard time describing the appeal of the on-surface simple, yet daringly radical domestic drama, *The Home Maker*. "A simple little tale" (*Evening Journal*); "Just a human story … but it's one of the most gripping things seen on Broadway" (*Evening World*); "It hasn't a villain nor a vamp; there isn't any triangle or a shipwreck, but it's a good story" (*New York Graphic*).

It's true, the film has none of the razzle-dazzle that has turned other silent films into enduring classics; there are no visual pyrotechnics, no bravura star turns, no shocking plot twists. Instead, it tells the story of an ordinary couple struggling with mundane problems—household chores, tantrum-prone children, the boredom of office routine, and the anxiety of never having quite enough money. In other words, life, as most of us experience it. And it makes these quotidian details completely absorbing.

Eva (Alice Joyce) and Lester (Clive Brook) are familiar types. Eva is an ambitious woman who feels trapped as a housewife. She turns her pent-up energy into a perfectionist obsession with cleanliness and order. Lester is a poetic dreamer who loathes his job as accountant in a department store. He only comes alive reciting rhymes to his children. The frustrated dreams of husband and wife have turned the whole family sour; parents and children are all tense, miserable, afflicted with a host of psychosomatic illnesses (early in the film one of the stressed-out kids upchucks his meal after a particularly fraught family dinner). The family's affairs are going from bad to worse when an unexpected accident forces Eva and Lester to switch roles; she goes to work and he stays home with the kids. Like magic, the family is soon flourishing in direct proportion to their previous misery.

The credit for this subversive little fable and its critique of marital gender roles goes primarily to Dorothy Canfield Fisher, who wrote the 1924 best-selling novel *The Home-Maker*, which the film follows faithfully, beginning to end. In addition to writing dozens of popular novels, Fisher was a classic 1920s progressive; she supported prison reform and adult education, as well as proselytized for companionate marriage through her best-selling romances. On a trip to Italy she became interested in Maria Montessori's theories of education and wrote two nonfiction books on Montessori methods and worked the educator's ideas into a few of her novels, including *The Home-Maker*. Fisher's reputation has taken a hit in recent years, because of negative stereotypes of Native Americans and French Canadians that also found their way into her books. However, even if she did not manage to transcend the racial prejudices of her home state of Vermont, she was ahead of her time when it came to gender roles.

Historian Diane Lichtenstein suggests the novel was also a critique of the new, ever-higher standards that were imposed on housekeepers in the 1920s by experts of all kinds. It was an era that saw the professionalization of housekeeping, with Home Economics established as a college major and "scientific household management" the latest buzzword. As usual when women emerged from the home, as they

Clive Brook. Photo courtesy of Photofest

had during World War I and the following decade, there was a media campaign to drive them back inside to scrub floors—*Home Maker* the movie opens with Eva slaving to eradicate a stubborn grease spill. When Lester takes over housekeeping, his first step is to relax the standards of cleanliness that have made the family miserable. In a scene that is both comic and moving, the two older children conceal dirt from their now working mother by hiding it under a couch pillow. She moves the pillow and brushes the crumbs absentmindedly to the floor, as she tells her family stories about her day at work. The two kids exchange a look of amazed relief.

The miracle of this film is how many things could have gone wrong with the story during its transition from book to film that didn't. The gender-role switch could have been played for *Mrs. Doubtfire*-style laughs (a common approach to role-swapping films, both then and now). The film could have turned Eva into a villain à la *Craig's Wife*, or any number of monstrous movie mothers. It may be a backhanded compliment to congratulate scenario writer Mary O'Hara and director King Baggot for not messing up Fisher's book, but the ability to get out of the way of a good story is rare, especially in the ego-driven business of filmmaking.

Clive Brook and Alice Joyce

O'Hara may have understood the material. She was a divorced mother when she wrote for films in the 1920s; she left Hollywood with her second husband for a ranch in Wyoming and future fame as author of the children's classic *My Friend Flicka*. Director Baggot's evident sympathy for the novel's subject is harder to fathom. In 1925 Baggot was a motion-picture warhorse; he'd worked in the business as actor, scenario writer, and/or director since 1909. Possibly Baggot felt a kinship to dreamy, out-of-step Lester, dismissed by one of the film's townspeople as "a useless man." Once a hugely popular star, Baggot was on the downslide when he made *The Home Maker*. He struggled to find a place in the rapidly changing business that had, literally, left him behind—his reluctance to move west with Universal had hastened the end of his acting career. His record as a director was uneven, perhaps partly because of the alcoholism that led to the breakup of his own family in 1930. Historian Kevin Brownlow described *Raffles*, the film Baggot made just before *The Home Maker*, as one of the worst silent movies he'd ever seen; he called *The Home Maker* "a forgotten classic."

When the film was released in the summer of 1925 the reviews were mostly positive, with only Mordaunt Hall of the *New York Times* exhibiting his usual wrong-headedness. He titled his review "A Cowardly Husband," decreeing that "the utterly impossible ending should also have been changed for the picture" and complaining squeamishly about the "unnecessary details, some of which are repellent," meaning, of course, the scene where poor Henry (Maurice Murphy) gets sick to his stomach. Household drudgery and the messy side of raising children were clearly foreign topics to Hall. The *Times* critic admitted the actors were talented but said they were wasted in the film. In fact, Clive Brook and Alice Joyce, both cast against type as a decidedly unglamorous couple, give subtle, riveting performances. They are matched by child actor Billy Kent Schaeffer playing their furiously bad-tempered youngest son.

Universal's ad campaign did its best to exploit the film's radical aspect. "It will take your town by the ears!" one spread blared, predicting, "It will be the most discussed picture of the year." *Exhibitors Trade Review* agreed that was the angle to exploit: "Stress the idea of women's equality, and bring up the question as to whether or not woman's sphere should be confined to the home." *Variety*, however, thought that conversations did not equal dollars: "it is the type of picture that will be much discussed in certain circles, but will hardly figure as a strong box-office proposition."

Fisher wrote in the novel that it would be more acceptable for Lester to rob a bank than to stay home and care for his children, if he was healthy and capable of finding work. Given such rigid conventions, one might expect to find more evidence of movie-sparked controversy—letters to the editor or sermonizing in church—the kind of free publicity that Universal hoped for. Whatever spirited discussions *The Home Maker* provoked have been lost to time, and the contemporary critics contented themselves with describing the film as "unusual" in their mostly positive reviews. Perhaps the lack of controversy was a sign of just how immoveable gender roles were; they needed no strident defense because the book and the film were no real threat. *The Home Maker*'s continuing power lies, in part, in the timelessness of its critique. We have only to look at the families around us to see that, for most, domestic gender roles have changed little. This is part of the film's magic. It offers us the uncanny spectacle of current social issues flickering on the screen from across a gap of almost a hundred years.

— Monica Nolan

Photo courtesy of Juno Films

SHIRAZ: A ROMANCE OF INDIA

MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT BY UTSAV LAL

DIRECTED BY FRANZ OSTEN, INDIA, 1928
CAST Himansu Rai, Enakshi Rama Rau, Charu Roy, and Seeta Devi **PRODUCTION** Himansu Rai Film **PRINT SOURCE** Juno Films

In the 1920s, actor-producer Himansu Rai collaborated with German director Franz Osten to make three captivatingly beautiful films in India, with all-Indian casts. *Light of Asia* (*Prem Sanyas*, 1925), *Shiraz* (1928), and *A Throw of Dice* (*Prapancha Pash*, 1929) represent not just three of precious few Indian-made silents to survive but are also a testament to the accomplishment of the country's burgeoning film industry. *Shiraz*, the middle film, is arguably the most sumptuously beautiful, a jewel of international cinema that wraps a tragic romance into the history of a marvel of Mughal architecture.

Made with the support of British and German studios, *Shiraz* was an international production, with a classically Indian aesthetic. Viewed today, now sparkling in a revelatory restoration by the British Film Institute, *Shiraz* is an unforgettable spectacle, celebrating both India's national mythology and its stunning landscapes. It is an epic romance that culminates in the building of the Taj Mahal, and for sheer visual splendor, there are few films of its era to match it.

Rai, born in 1892 to an aristocratic Bengali family, had trained as a lawyer and it was while working in London that he met Indian playwright and future filmmaker Niranjan Pal, who went on to write all three of Rai's Osten-directed silents. Rai wanted to produce films to appeal to both Indian and Western audiences and eventually to set up his own film studio. Osten's Bavaria-based studio Emelka was quick to sign up to his first plan, which helped to bring in the UK's British Instructional Films (BIF), a mostly nonfiction outfit pivoting at this time toward narrative work. Rai acted as both producer and star on the Osten trilogy, and he met his wife, future movie star Devika Rani, on the third of these coproductions, *A Throw of Dice*. Together they went on to achieve his dream of founding the famous Bombay Talkies studio in 1934. Rai died just a few years later in 1940, but his legacy both as cofounder of that studio and for his involvement in many of India's earliest films is still celebrated today.

Osten was born Franz Ostermayr in Munich in 1876. As a young man he took over his father's photography studio with his brother Peter, and they transformed the business into a movie theater, with Franz also finding work as a cameraman. In 1909, Peter founded his own studio, Münchener Lichtspielkunst, later known as Emelka (MLK). During the war, Osten was first a newspaper correspondent and then a soldier, seeing action in Tyrol, Galicia, France, and Italy. He returned to Germany and was soon working as Emelka's chief film director, making several *Heimat-films*, celebrating the beauty of the German countryside and the homespun values of rural life. The films he made in India took a comparable approach, hymns to a nation's mythic past and natural beauty.

Osten's fascination with India reflected a wider German obsession with a romanticized East that persisted throughout the 1920s. There was a growing interest in Buddhism, several popular novels with Indian themes, and the poet Rabindranath Tagore spoke to packed halls when he visited the country in 1921. Joe May's *The Indian Tomb* was a box-office hit that year, and that film, based on a novel by Thea von Harbou, had a story not dissimilar to *Shiraz*,

Charu Roy (center). Photo courtesy of Juno Films

whose German subtitle translates as *Tomb of a Great Love*. (Richard Eichberg's 1938 remake of *The Indian Tomb* appears to have been heavily influenced by Rai's production of *Shiraz*, as well.) Osten wasn't satisfied with merely creating Indian-inspired sets in German studios, however, and he jumped at Rai's offer to make a more authentic Indian romance.

After directing his three Indian silents, Osten returned home for a few years before the Nazi takeover sent him back to India where he made more movies with Rai. He directed sixteen films for Bombay Talkies, in the early days of the formal Indian film industry, which is now the most prolific in the world. At the outset of World War II, Osten was arrested by the British colonial authorities as a German citizen and interned in India for eight months. Sadly, by the time he was released, his friend Rai had passed away. Osten returned to Germany and Emelka, which by then had become Bavaria Films, today one of Europe's biggest film production companies.

Shiraz was the first of Osten's Indian films to be a hit in India itself, as well as in Europe, no doubt because it combines an exquisite aesthetic with an engrossing melodramatic narrative set in a distant and safely fictionalized past. It is based on one of Pal's own stage plays, which creates an epic romantic backstory for the monumental Taj Mahal. The hero, Shiraz, is a potter's son who falls in love with his adopted sister Selima, a foundling. Her parentage is unknown to Shiraz's family, but a prologue shows us that she is a princess who survived a raid on her caravan when she was still a baby. As a teenager, Selima is kidnapped and sold as a slave to the palace of Prince Khurram in Agra. Although they are separated, Shiraz remains devoted to his first love, while the Prince also falls for Selima, who reciprocates his ardor. There is more drama to come as the story unfolds, including the revelation of Selima's royal birth, the minxy machinations of Dalia, a rival for the Prince's love, and a terrifying threat to Shiraz's life. In the film's finale, Shiraz and the prince both prove their enduring love for Selima by building the Taj Mahal in her honor.

Shiraz's location photography, shot in bright natural light, is simply astonishing. The opulent Mughal palaces (Rai's coup was to get the Maharaja of Jaipur onboard) and the Taj Mahal itself, as well as the sweeping Indian countryside, are captured in all their glory by the film's two cinematographers: Englishman Henry Harris (a BIF staffer who later specialized in visual effects) and German Emil Schünemann, a veteran of silent classics such as Fritz Lang's *Spione* (1920) and Protazanov's *Aelita: Queen of Mars* (1924). The international crew included Promode Nath as art director (for all three films in the trilogy) and production manager Victor Peers, who later worked with Hitchcock and ran Granada Television in the UK.

Rai stars as Shiraz, of course, and makes for a compelling hero, growing from infatuated youth to lonely craftsman as the film progresses, and Enakshi Rama Rau offers a memorably delicate performance as the princess he is besotted with. However, it is Seeta Devi as the nefarious love-rival Dalia with a ring full of poison who steals the show. Otherwise known as Renee Smith, this Anglo-Indian actress, here trading the sorrowfulness she brought to *Prem Sanyas* for a devilish smirk, appears in all three of Osten's Indian silents. Charu Roy plays the prince, who begins as a chivalrous lover and ends up as a proud tyrant. Roy was already beginning his career a film director and made a romance in a similar vein to *Shiraz* in the same year, *Loves of a Mughal Prince*, also starring himself and Devi.

Devi's very modern, vixenish performance is not the only startling aspect of this film. It's a common misconception that kissing was once banned in Indian cinema. While such embraces were largely absent from the Indian screen from the 1940s until their return in the 1990s, there was no official ban, and earlier films, including *Shiraz*, contain some very passionate clinches. There's plenty of violent action here, too, from the bandit raid on the caravan to an unforgettable scene in which Shiraz escapes a terrifying death by a whisker.

Shiraz remains a tribute not just to the ambition of the early Indian film industry, but its international outlook. Rai's Bombay Talkies hired several German technicians in the 1930s and incorporated European style into its films. Here in these precious silent films you can see that first flowering—*Shiraz* is the most beautiful example.

— Pamela Hutchinson

Mary Johnson. Photo courtesy of the Swedish Film Institute

SIR ARNE'S TREASURE

MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT BY THE MATTI BYE ENSEMBLE

DIRECTED BY MAURITZ STILLER, SWEDEN, 1919
CAST Richard Lund, Mary Johnson, Erik Stocklassa, Bror Berger, Stina Berg, Wanda Rothgardt, Axil Nilsson, Hjalmar Selander, and Concordia Selander **PRODUCTION** Svensk Biografteatern **PRINT SOURCE** Swedish Film Institute

Snow is inherently cinematic. It forms a white screen, like a Chinese scroll, on which dark forms have the spare eloquence of calligraphy. And while it may suggest peace, it also evokes the burn and sting of cold, giving bite to scenes of extremity and struggle: Lillian Gish, a frail wisp battered by the blizzard in Griffith's *Way Down East* (1920); the battle on the frozen lake in Eisenstein's *Alexander Nevsky* (1938); the black-clad urban detective chasing a killer through pure snowdrifts in Nicholas Ray's *On Dangerous Ground* (1951).

Few films have captured the stark and deadly beauty of snow better than Mauritz Stiller's *Sir Arne's Treasure*, subtitled *A Winter Ballad*. Set during a freakishly harsh winter in 16th-century Sweden, it opens with armies tramping through the snow, soldiers on horseback driving prisoners on foot. No less chilling than the scenery, the plot revolves around an atrocity—a kind of medieval *In Cold Blood*—in which an entire household is slaughtered by a trio of Scottish mercenaries, who steal a chest full of treasure. But this cruel story is told through haunting, runic images: a great house blazing in the snow, a sailing ship trapped in the ice, a ghostly girl, a funeral procession snaking across the frozen sea. True to its subtitle, the film has the feeling of a blood-steeped ballad or epic poem, but it also has moments of emotional subtlety and intimacy, especially as it develops the theme of an innocent young woman's fatal love for a brutal man.

Sir Arne's Treasure (*Herr Arnes Pengar*) was the film that brought Stiller international acclaim, a few years before his discovery of Greta Garbo—the achievement that later cemented his immortality but also brought his career to a premature end. In 1919 he was at his peak, as was the studio where he worked, Svensk Filmindustri, which had just been formed out of a merger between Svensk Biografteatern and Filmindustribolaget Skandia. Under the direction of Charles Magnusson—that rare producer who considered directors to be artists and granted them substantial freedom—Svensk was focused on making fewer and better films, with an emphasis on literary adaptations with historical settings. The studio's talent included Stiller and his friendly rival, the great actor-director Victor Sjöström, and the Nobel Prize-winning novelist Selma Lagerlöf, who collaborated in bringing her books to the screen, including both *Sir Arne's Treasure* (based on her 1903 novel *The Treasure*) and *The Saga of Gösta Berling* (1924). That film would be Stiller and Garbo's ticket to Hollywood, a place where Stiller unhappily encountered less deferential producers. Known to be moody and quarrelsome, he never completed a film at MGM, the studio that had brought him over, though he did direct the excellent *Hotel Imperial* (1927) with Pola Negri at Paramount. Discouraged, he returned to Sweden where he died in 1928, aged only forty-five.

Unlike *Gösta Berling*, *Sir Arne's Treasure* has no world-famous leads; it also has no obvious protagonist. There is Sir Archie (Richard Lund), the youngest and most appealing of the Scottish mercenaries, who woos Elsalill (Mary Johnson), the only survivor of the massacre of Sir Arne's household. Lund has a brooding, dark-eyed presence that made him a

matinee idol in the teens, but he never became well-known outside of Sweden. Johnson, a delicate fair-haired waif, wound up making films in Germany where, in 1932, she married Rudolf Klein-Rogge, the sinister anti-hero of Fritz Lang's *Dr. Mabuse* and *Metropolis*. The romance between Archie and Elsalill is deeply disturbing, even in a film that includes a massacre (which we don't witness) and a shocking scene where the mercenaries drive a horse and sleigh onto a patch of thin ice to dispose of them (animal-lovers, beware). It is a romance between a woman shattered by trauma and a man crushed by guilt, each haunted by the vision of Elsalill's murdered younger sister, Berghild. The ambiguity and psychological complexity of this relationship are startling—the kind of elements it is tempting to describe as "modern," though in fact they have always been present, if rare, in popular cinema. After learning the truth about her lover, she is torn between turning him in and, unthinkably, protecting him. He begs forgiveness, claiming that starvation, cold, and drunkenness turned him into a beast; but his remorse doesn't stop him from using his beloved as a human shield when he is cornered.

Earlier, there is a spine-tingling moment when the dead sister's spectral image shimmers before him as he caresses Elsalill's long blonde hair, the first of several appearances by the ghost of Berghild, who also appears to her sister in a dream and leads her to the truth about Archie. This is a world of visions and premonitions, a world in which nature and even inanimate objects are imbued with power, rarely benign. The first time the treasure appears, it glows with an unearthly light; it is said to bring bad luck on its owners, and the seductive beauty is part of that curse. Sitting in the fire-lit hall, Sir Arne's wife

Mary Johnson and Wanda Rothgardt. Photo courtesy of the Swedish Film Institute

THE FORCE OF NATURE, IN ITS EXTREMES OF SAVAGERY AND TENDER RENEWAL, DOMINATES

suddenly has an ominous vision of the mercenaries preparing for their attack; from miles away, she hears the sharpening of long knives on a whetstone. The captain of a sailing ship trapped in the ice at Marstrand (looking for all the world like the *Endurance*, Ernest Shackleton's ship, which was locked in and crushed by the ice on an expedition to Antarctica in 1915) paces the deck, brooding over the suspicion that it is the presence of evildoers that keeps the ice from thawing and freeing the harbor. The mercenaries, who have come to the port hoping to sail home to Scotland, are held captive by the judgment of the elements.

The force of nature, in its extremes of savagery and tender renewal, dominates Nordic cinema of the silent era, giving a raw splendor to films like Sjöström's *The Outlaw and His Wife* (1918), Harald Schwenzen's *Pan* (1922), and Axel Lindblom's *The Strongest* (1929). And while summer's sun-dappled forests and breeze-stirred meadows offer sensual pleasure, the natural world is often stony and unforgiving. The bleak final scenes of *The Outlaw and His Wife*, in which the titular couple, starving in a frigid, cave-like hut, turn on each other viciously, makes the same point as the scene in *Sir Arne's Treasure* in which the mercenaries—bearded, ragged, and half-dead from hunger an exposure—invade a poor fisherman's cottage, where they grab food like wild animals before collapsing into a drunken stupor. There is a winter of the soul, when humanity goes dormant and only base survival remains.

Both of these films were shot by Julius Jaenzon, sometimes billed as J. Julius, a cinematographer known for his mastery of challenging but spectacular locations, of camera movements that fluidly track people in motion, and of optical effects, such as the elaborate ghostly doubling in Sjöström's *The Phantom Carriage* (1921). His work on *Sir Arne's Treasure* includes one of the greatest single shots in silent cinema, in which black-clad village women cross the ice in a somber funeral procession, led by four men in white robes carrying a bier. The simple curve of this dark line as it advances toward the camera defines the depth and emptiness of the frozen wasteland, while the flowing movement, like the first stream of open water splitting the ice, reveals the endurance and dignity of the people who live in it.

— Imogen Sara Smith

1919

A DECADE ENDS AND AN AGE BEGINS.

6 SEPTEMBER

In a year when automobile sales doubled, the Transcontinental Motor Convoy completes its 3,251-mile trek from Washington, DC, to San Francisco, CA. Expedition leader Dwight D. Eisenhower uses the findings to develop the U.S. interstate highway system during his presidency.

12 SEPTEMBER

Poet, war hero, and bombast Gabriele D'Annunzio marches twenty-six hundred Italian war veterans into Fiume—recently ceded to the Kingdom of Serbia, Croats, and Slovenes at the Paris Peace Conference—and expels Allied forces, later declaring himself duce. In Munich, Adolf Hitler sways the German Workers' Party against the succession of Prussia.

18 SEPTEMBER

Ernst Lubitsch's epic spectacle about the French Revolution, *Madame Dubarry*, inaugurates Ufa's new Palast-am-Zoo theater in Berlin.

21 SEPTEMBER

Eight White Sox teammates meet in a hotel room to discuss throwing the World Series at the behest of organized crime.

22 SEPTEMBER

Sir Arne's Treasure premieres in Stockholm. A Swedish review calls the ghost scenes in Mauritz Stiller's film "small masterpieces of photographic technique." In the U.S., steelworkers begin a massive nationwide strike to protest company harassment of union organizers. Owners use racist and anti-Communist rhetoric to turn public opinion against the workers.

2 OCTOBER

Woodrow Wilson has a debilitating stroke and his wife Edith runs a months-long "bedside government" delegating to Cabinet members.

17 OCTOBER

Without warrants or charges, U.S. Attorney General Michael Palmer orders the arrest of more than ten thousand suspected communists and anarchists, mostly immigrants, in twenty-three different cities. The Palmer Raids are orchestrated by J. Edgar Hoover, head of the FBI's "Radical" Division, and spur the formation of the American Civil Liberties Union early the next year. Sometime this month, film director Alexander Korda is detained following the overthrow of the short-lived Hungarian Democratic Republic. After his release, he leaves his native Hungary never to return.

1 NOVEMBER

Four hundred thousand coalminers, who had agreed to a wage freeze through the end of WWI, walk off the job demanding a share of the industry's wartime boon. By the end of the year four million Americans participate in labor strikes.

6 NOVEMBER

Native Americans who had served in the war could now apply for U.S. citizenship with proof of an honorable discharge. Not until 1924 is citizenship their legal birthright.

9 NOVEMBER

In *Feline Follies*, Master Tom romances Kitty by the ashcan while the mice have their way in the kitchen. By the end of the year, Master Tom becomes Felix the Cat and a cartoon star is born.

11 NOVEMBER

At the first annual Armistice Day Parade in Centralia, Washington, American Legionnaires—mostly former lumberjacks—break from the line and invade the Industrial Workers of the World union hall. Four legionnaires die when union members fight back. WWI veteran and leader of the local "Wobblies" Wesley Everest is charged with the murders and hanged by a mob later that night.

14 NOVEMBER

Gabriel Capone dies of a heart attack in Brooklyn and his son Alphonse leaves a legitimate bookkeeping job in Baltimore to return home. Sometime the following year he settles in Chicago.

19 NOVEMBER

American expatriate Sylvia Beach opens her Shakespeare and Company bookstore in Paris. She later publishes Irish writer James Joyce's modernist novel *Ulysses*, which runs serialized throughout 1919.

21 NOVEMBER

Director Frank Hurley begins an Australian tour of his film, *In the Grip of the Polar Pack Ice*, later retitled *South: Sir Ernest Shackleton's Glorious Epic of the Antarctic*.

7 DECEMBER

The second performance of the Dada-Matinée takes place in Berlin. Participants include Hannah Höch, whose 1919 photomontage *Cut with a Kitchen Knife Dada through the Last Weimar Beer-Belly Cultural Epoch of Germany* features cutouts of Pola Negri as Carmen and Asta Nielsen as Hamlet.

19 DECEMBER

E.C. Segar's Thimble Theatre comic strip debuts as a parody of show business. "From Cabaret to Country" stars Olive Oyl as Lizzie Lampshade doing the shimmy so well she churns butter.

21 DECEMBER

Stripped of her American citizenship Jewish immigrant Emma Goldman boards the "Soviet Ark" tasked with deporting 248 other so-called radicals to Russia. In 1924 the decommissioned ship becomes the set for Buster Keaton's *The Navigator*.

31 DECEMBER

Americans ring in the last New Year before Prohibition takes effect. In October, the U.S. Congress passed the Volstead Act over Woodrow Wilson's veto, setting the stage for bootleggers, crime bosses, speakeasies, and flappers to populate the movies for years to come.

Emma Goldman

Craig Ward and Buster Keaton. Photo courtesy of Lobster Films

OUR HOSPITALITY

MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT BY MONT ALTO MOTION PICTURE ORCHESTRA

DIRECTED BY BUSTER KEATON AND JOHN G. BLYSTONE, USA, 1923
CAST Buster Keaton, Joe Roberts, Natalie Talmadge, Ralph Bushman, Craig Ward, Monte F. Collins, Kitty Bradbury, and Joe Keaton **PRODUCTION** Joseph M. Schenck Productions **PRINT SOURCE** Lobster Films

Although *The General* (1926) is Buster Keaton's best-known and admired film, his 1923 feature *Our Hospitality* is one of his most perfectly constructed works. A period piece, *Our Hospitality* is set against the unmarred landscapes of the American South during the pre-Civil War era. Both films employ visual beauty and dramatic integrity as a backdrop to Keaton's brilliant, original comedy.

Directed by Keaton and John G. (Jack) Blystone, *Our Hospitality* was a Keaton family affair. Keaton's wife, Natalie Talmadge, at first objected to Keaton taking her and their infant son on location to the picturesque country of Truckee and Lake Tahoe. (Chaplin also used Truckee to great effect in the opening sequence of *The Gold Rush*, 1925). However, when Keaton offered his wife the part of leading lady, she quickly retracted her objections. Their son Jimmy (billed as Buster Keaton, Jr. but later renamed James Talmadge) is the one-year-old seen in the film's prologue, and Buster's father, Joe, plays the railroad engineer.

From an idea by writer Jean Havez, the comedy is loosely derived from the decidedly humorless real-life feud between the Hatfields and the McCoys, two large Appalachian clans whose hatred of each other is legendary. The film begins with a prologue straight out of melodrama in which the grudge between the two families (renamed the Canfields and the McKays) is established. The main story, set twenty years later in 1831, has Keaton playing twenty-one-year-old Willie McKay, a New York City dandy who is summoned to the Old South to claim his family's estate. To film Willie McKay's journey to the South, Keaton used one of the first steam locomotives ever manufactured. He chose to reproduce an English steam engine, George Stephenson's *Rocket*, because he thought it looked much funnier than its American counterpart, the *DeWitt Clinton*. Keaton was a lifelong railroad enthusiast (he grew up traveling by train from city to city on the vaudeville circuit with his parents) and he frequently incorporated trains in his films, none more memorably than *The General*, which is itself a major character in the film.

Keaton was scrupulous with every detail of *Our Hospitality*. Fred Gabourie's art direction is of exceptional quality, as are Walter J. Israel's costumes. The entire production was so carefully researched and staged that Keaton's precise duplication of the gentlemen's hobby-horse, the first bicycle ever made, became a permanent part of the collection of the Smithsonian in Washington, DC, at the institution's request.

Our Hospitality was Keaton's second feature-length film. His first feature-length comedy, *Three Ages* (1923), was an anthology of three segments—in essence, three short films—parodying historical epics. *Our Hospitality* was Keaton's first feature film with a single narrative arc and his first feature-length masterwork. The dramatic logic of the story, to which Keaton gave a comic twist, was a departure from anything Keaton had previously done. In this respect, he took inspiration from the dramatic sequences in Chaplin's groundbreaking work *The Kid* (1921) as well as Harold Lloyd's influential feature-length comedy *Grandma's Boy* (1922). Keaton explained in a 1965 interview:

> We were very conscious of our stories. We learned in a hurry that we couldn't make a feature-length picture the way we had done the two-reelers; we couldn't use impossible gags, what we call 'cartoon' gags, like the kind of things that happen to cartoon characters. We lost all of that when we started making feature pictures. They had to be believable, or your story wouldn't hold up.

Despite the meticulous planning and precise execution of *Our Hospitality*, the production was fraught with difficulties and beset by unanticipated problems. Joe Roberts, who plays the Canfield paterfamilias Joseph, suffered a stroke while on location and was hospitalized in nearby Reno, Nevada. He recovered sufficiently to continue the film, although his weakened condition is apparent in his final scenes. Just a month after the final retake, Roberts died. Three weeks after location filming began, Natalie Talmadge discovered she was pregnant with the Keaton's second son, Bobby. To complete the film, cinematographers Elgin Lessley and Gordon Jennings had to find creative ways to photograph Keaton's wife in order to camouflage her growing belly.

One of the most outstanding sequences in *Our Hospitality* depicts Willie McKay being pursued and ultimately falling into a river. McKay's sweetheart sets out to help, and she too falls in, so McKay has to help her. The scene, shot on the Truckee River, nearly killed Keaton. He was splashing in the river with a hold-back wire tied around him. At one point, the wire broke, and Keaton took off like a shot down the river rapids. Production coordinator Ernie Orsatti and several other men working on the film ran after him along the riverbank but were unable to help him. Finally, Keaton was able to grab onto a branch of an overhanging tree, barely preventing himself from colliding into the oncoming rocks, but not before an entire school of little water snakes swarmed around him. What must have seemed to Keaton like hundreds of baby eels were flicking their tongues at him, and he did not know whether they were poisonous or not. All he could think of was finding something to hold onto before he was smashed to bits. Of course, Keaton kept all of that in the film in what is perhaps its most thrilling scene. The finished sequence is one of Keaton's marvels, a demonstration of his physical dexterity and skill, as well as his moviemaking genius.

Although most of *Our Hospitality* was filmed on location, they shot the amazing waterfall rescue sequence at the Robert Brunton Studios in Hollywood. Keaton constructed a waterfall over the studio's large, concrete swimming pool, with a miniature landscape in the background to create the illusion of a distant valley below the falls. Keaton performed all the stunt work for the rescue himself, swallowing so much water as he dangled beneath the falls that he required medical assistance. As Keaton later recalled, "I had to go down to the doctor right there and then. They pumped out my ears and nostrils and drained me, because when a full volume of water like that comes down and hits you and you're upside down—then you really get it."

All the difficulties aside, Keaton remembered the production fondly. The location filming in Tahoe with his family reminded him of his happy boyhood summers spent on Lake Muskegon in Michigan. Keaton was proud of *Our Hospitality* (he always referred to the film simply as *Hospitality*) and considered it one of his finest films. The critics agreed. *Variety* wrote, "The picture is splendidly cast, flawlessly directed and intelligently photographed. The usual low comedy and slapstick have been modified and woven into a consistent story that is as funny as it is entertaining." The *New York Times* maintained, "This picture is one of whims, and in many sequences whimsical … This funny film moves along quietly at the outset, but in the end it gets there, and to our mind is a mixture that is extremely pleasing, as there is no out-and-out slapstick effect." According to Keaton, the film also was profitable. *Our Hospitality* was produced at an approximate cost of $225,000 with a worldwide gross of more than $500,000.

Buster Keaton and Natalie Talmadge. Photo courtesy of Jeffrey Vance

Important and influential film critics such as James Agee, Walter Kerr, Andrew Sarris, and Roger Ebert later championed *Our Hospitality* among Keaton's other silent-film work.

The Buster Keaton canon is an invaluable gift to students of cinema history as well as to a long list of illustrious actors, filmmakers, and animators who were greatly inspired by Keaton's films. Lucille Ball, who had known Keaton from their days at Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer in the late 1940s, acknowledged her debt to Keaton with respect to handling props in comedy situations. Such lessons served her well in one of television's most enduring situation comedies, *I Love Lucy* (1951–1957). Cartoonist Chuck Jones and actor-director Mel Brooks have cited Keaton as an influence. More recently, Jackie Chan, George Lucas (for the *Star Wars* franchise), Tom Cruise (for the *Mission Impossible* franchise), director George Miller (*Mad Max: Fury Road*), and animators affiliated with the Walt Disney Company and Pixar Animation Studios have studied Keaton's silent masterworks to create their own breathtaking stunts and visual comedy. Nearly one hundred years after its release, *Our Hospitality* and the genius of Buster Keaton remain inestimable for those who wish to learn and, of course, for those who merely wish to laugh.

— Jeffrey Vance

BUST'D BUSTER

As a tyke Buster Keaton developed the necessary body calluses to take his own pratfalls. As one of Three Keatons on vaudeville, he was cast as the "Human Mop," variously mock-strangled, kicked, and tossed about, sometimes sent flying into the orchestra pit by father Joe. According to family legend, the conditioning started way earlier than his stage debut and even before he earned the nickname Buster for emerging unhurt from a fall down a flight of stairs. "About two months before I was born," he recounts in *My Wonderful World of Slapstick*, "my mother was in an accident. Pop was driving her to their boardinghouse in a small Iowa town but got out of the buggy to buy something at the general store. Startled by a flash of lightening, the horse bolted. He raced around the corner at such speed that the carriage went over on two wheels, throwing my mother on the ground."

He goes on to describe a black-and-blue childhood, involving cyclones, washer wringers, and bricks, all fodder for the lore of the "Little Boy Who Can't Be Damaged." It is true that his father knocked him out cold twice during a performance, first by throwing him into a backdrop, which gave way to a brick wall behind, and, another time, inadvertently kicking Buster in the head. Backstage wasn't very safe for young Keaton either. In a Chicago theater he stepped on a rusty nail, which a prop man yanked out with a pair of pliers. The doctor who treated his festering foot days later in Milwaukee said any further delay and Buster would have had lockjaw ... and we haven't even gotten to the films yet.

THE ELECTRIC HOUSE

During the first time trying to make this two-reeler about a struggling botanist hired to wire a mansion with gadgetries of convenience, Buster broke his ankle. "The accident happened on a studio-made escalator," he recalls, "when the sole of my slap shoe got caught in the webbing of the moving machine." No one could unplug the contraption fast enough and his bone snapped, the escalator still moving him upward. But it wasn't over. "As I got to the top," he goes on to say, "I was tossed for twelve feet." They suspended production on the film, picking up again months later.

THE THREE AGES

In the Modern episode of Keaton's first feature-length film the hero is supposed to leap from the roof of one building onto another. Performing the stunt, Keaton misjudged the distance and slammed into the oncoming wall, barely hanging on with his fingertips. When he couldn't keep his grip, he dropped thirty-five feet into a safety net. The cameras caught it all and Keaton decided to incorporate the accident into the film. After taking three days off to recover, he completed the fall for the camera, dropping down into two awnings then grabbing onto a drainpipe, which then dislodges from the building and sends him swinging through a window and down a firehouse pole.

...he was cast as the "Human Mop"

OUR HOSPITALITY

It is Keaton, rather than costar Natalie Talmadge, in need of rescuing during the whitewater rapids scene when the safety wire broke and sent him whooshing down the Truckee. He ended up saving himself by grabbing onto an overhanging branch at a bend in the river. According to Marion Meade's 1995 biography of Keaton his first words when they found him soaking wet on the river bank were, "Did Nat see it?" True to Keaton form, he left the terrifying sequence in the finished film.

SHERLOCK JR.

When Keaton complained of headaches a doctor asked if he had ever sustained a skull or spinal fracture. In his memoirs, Keaton recalls: "I had to think for a while before figuring out that it must have happened during a sequence of *Sherlock Jr.* ... I ran along the top of a train and grabbed a rope dangling from a water tower to swing off to the ground. This set up the gag for the spout to open. But we underestimated the volume of water that would fall on me from that ten-inch spout. The stream struck me so hard it tore loose my grip on the rope. I fell back on the track with my neck snapped down square across the steel rail." In the film, Buster gets up and runs off in the same shot.

THE NAVIGATOR

Presumably with his still-fractured cervical vertebra, Keaton embarks on his next film and almost chokes to death. He wrote about shooting the run-up to the underwater scene for which he donned a 220-pound diving suit: "Smoking a cigarette when the girl tried to put my helmet on. I left the cigarette in my mouth while I reached up to help her get it on. Accidentally, she gave it a half twist, locking it. The smoke from the cigarette threw me into a frenzy of coughing. Fortunately, Ernie Orsatti, the [future] St. Louis Cardinals' ballplayer who was working with our crew, noticed the trouble I was in and twisted off the helmet in the nick of time."

THE GENERAL

As a railway engineer in the South who attempts to sabotage a Union mission during the Civil War, Keaton performs many dangerous maneuvers on a moving train—but his only injury was getting knocked unconscious by cannon fire. He wasn't the only one put in danger, though. According to *Motion Picture News*, in the famously expensive shot of the train trestle giving way and the locomotive plunging into the water, cameraman Devereaux Jennings fractured his arm when tumbling debris crashed into his boat in the river below where he was photographing the action.

STEAMBOAT BILL JR.

Most remarkable of all is that in his last film before he signed over his independence to MGM Keaton didn't get hurt at all—unless a fast ball careering into his face and breaking his nose during an off-hours baseball game counts. Shooting what might be his most spectacularly perilous stunt—rigging a house to collapse around him during a storm—he's left standing, completely unscathed.

With special thanks to Jeffrey Vance

Buster Keaton in *Steamboat Bill Jr.*

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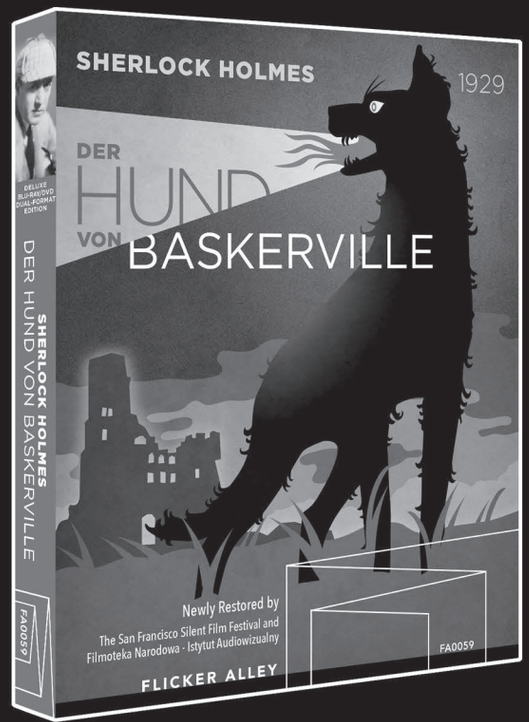

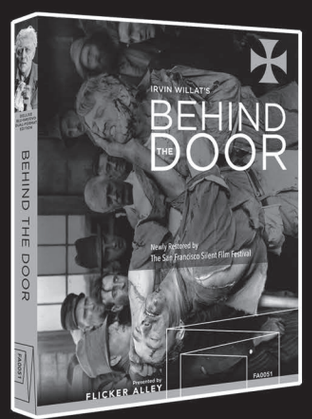

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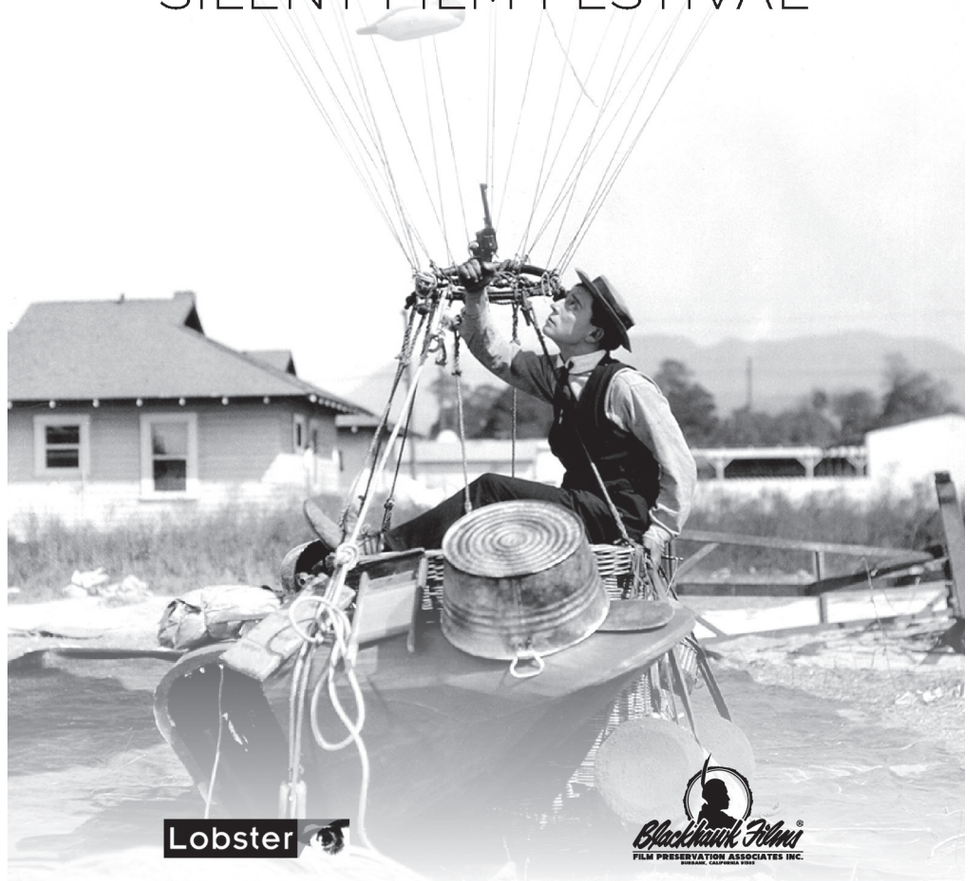

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