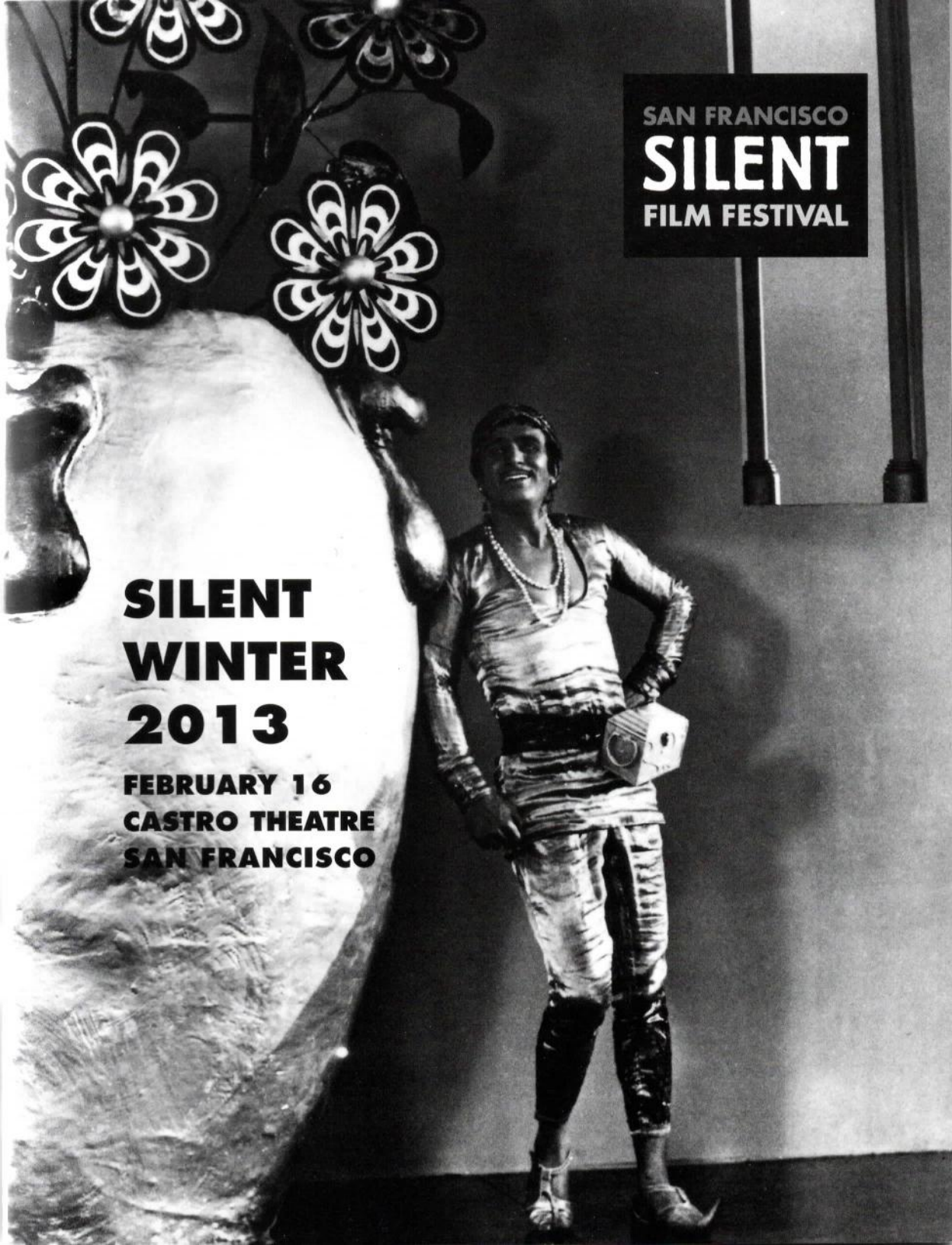

SAN FRANCISCO
SILENT
FILM FESTIVAL
SILENT
WINTER
2013
FEBRUARY 16
CASTRO THEATRE
SAN FRANCISCO

SILENT WINTER
FEBRUARY 16

10:00 am SNOW WHITE
Live Accompaniment by Donald Sosin on grand piano
Copresented by National Film Preservation Foundation and Walt Disney Family Museum
Introduced by J.B. Kaufman

12:00 noon THINK SLOW, ACT FAST: BUSTER KEATON SHORTS
Live Accompaniment by Donald Sosin on grand piano
Copresented by Exploratorium Cinema Arts
Introduced by Frank Buxton

2:30 pm THE THIEF OF BAGDAD
Live Accompaniment by Mont Alto Motion Picture Orchestra
Copresented by Fandor
Introduced by Jeffrey Vance

7:00 pm MY BEST GIRL
Live Accompaniment by Donald Sosin on grand piano
Copresented by 42nd Street Moon and BAM/PFA
Introduced by Jeffrey Vance

9:00 pm FAUST
Live Accompaniment by Christian Elliott on the Mighty Wurlitzer
Copresented by Goethe-Institut, MiDNiTES FOR MANiACS, and the San Francisco Film Society

MUSICIANS
at the festival

CHRISTIAN ELLIOTT
Christian Elliott is a prominent concert organist, equally at home performing literature of the church and theatre. Elliott has had a major career accompanying silent film at venues, including the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, the Stanford Theatre, and UCLA. Elliott was privileged to be mentored by several world-renowned organists and worked extensively with the "dean" of silent film accompaniment, Gaylord Carter.

MONT ALTO MOTION PICTURE ORCHESTRA
Based in Colorado, Mont Alto revives the sound of the silent film orchestra, using an extensive library of "photoplay music" that once belonged to movie theater orchestra leaders. The quintet—cellist David Short, clarinetist Brian Collins, trumpeter Dawn Kramer, pianist Rodney Sauer, and violinist Britt Swenson—is versatile enough to play music ranging from Tchaikovsky to the Charleston.

DONALD SOSIN
Donald Sosin scores films for major festivals, archives, and for DVD recordings. He has performed at the SF Silent Film Festival for many features and shorts, such as *Lady of the Pavements*, with his wife Joanna Seaton, and *The Adventures of Prince Achmed*. In 2011, the SF Chamber Orchestra premiered his octet composed for Harold Lloyd's *Now or Never*. Other commissions include MoMA, Chicago Symphony Orchestra, and Turner Classic Movies.

The Castro's Mighty Wurlitzer is owned by the Taylor Family and maintained by Ray Taylor, Dick Taylor, and Edward Millington Stout III.

Yamaha baby grand piano supplied by Absolutely Music.


SNOW
WHITE

SNOW WHITE

Live Accompaniment by Donald Sosin on grand piano

Cast Marguerite Clark (Snow White), Dorothy G. Cumming (Queen Brangomar), Creighton Hale (Prince Florimond), Lionel Braham (Berthold, the huntsman), Alice Washburn (Witch Hex) **Production** Famous Players Film Company 1916 **Director** J. Searle Dawley **Scenario** Winthrop Ames, based on his play, which was inspired by the Grimm Brothers fairy tale **Photography** H. Lyman Broening **Print Source** George Eastman House

Hindsight is a two-edged sword. On one hand, it can give us a useful perspective on historical events; on the other, it can saddle us with preconceptions that make those events difficult to understand or appreciate. To the first-time viewer, the 1916 Famous Players version of *Snow White* can be a puzzling experience. It seems to have little in common with what are now regarded as the two definitive versions of the *Snow White* story, the 1812 publication by the Grimm Brothers and the classic Walt Disney film of 1937, even though it had an indirect influence on the latter.

In fact, the Famous Players *Snow White* is a descendant of several theatrical adaptations, each of which had taken increasing liberties with the particulars of the Grimm fairy tale. The film's most immediate ancestor was a stage version by American theatrical impresario Winthrop Ames, who had presented it on Broadway as a special children's attraction at his Little Theatre in 1912. Ames had written the script himself, under the pseudonym Jessie Braham White, and had carefully supervised every detail of the presentation. His choice for the lead was Marguerite Clark, a 25-year-old actress under his management. Clark, already a 12-year Broadway veteran, had demonstrated that she could play a wide range of parts, and she readily took to the child/woman role of Snow White. "I have never enjoyed playing anything so much," she told the *New York Times*.

"I have never enjoyed playing anything so much."

Ames's *Snow White* enjoyed a successful theatrical run in 1912–13 and was revived for years afterward (the script is still in print today, performed occasionally by schools and other children's groups). In the meantime, Marguerite Clark followed up her years on the stage by signing a contract with Adolph Zukor's Famous Players Film Company in 1914. During the next two years, she starred in more than a dozen features, playing roles as varied as a young reformatory inmate in *The Crucible* and both title roles in *The Prince and the Pauper*, before the studio decided to make a film version of her stage success in *Snow White*. Paramount, distributor of the Famous Players productions, announced the film as a special Christmas attraction for 1916. The trade press made much of its running time. Breaking with the standard of five-reel program features, Paramount released *Snow White* in six reels. "It will be the first picture of this length ever released on the Paramount Program," *Motion Picture News* announced.

Winthrop Ames signed with Famous Players to adapt his play for the movies. The director, J. Searle Dawley, had already been with the studio for three years, working with luminaries such as Mary Pickford and Mrs. Fiske, as well as Marguerite Clark. *Snow White*, the film, retained most of Ames's departures from the Grimm Brothers tale: the names of the characters; Snow White's forced servitude as a kitchen drudge in the castle; and the division of the Queen's role into two separate characters—Queen Brangomar and Witch Hex—largely for comic effect. For their adaptation, Dawley and Ames added even more departures, many of them designed to take advantage of the magical effects possible in the movies. In 1912, Ames had introduced the idea of

a brown bird that guided Snow White through the forest to the dwarfs' house and otherwise came to her aid. Onstage, the brown bird had been played by a stuffed bird suspended on a wire. For the film, Dawley used a live bird and expanded its role in the plot, cobbling together a "performance" from artfully edited closeups. The forest exteriors, filmed in the woods near Savannah, Georgia, featured Spanish moss hanging from the tree branches—perhaps an incongruous sight in an Old World fairy-tale setting, but certainly a picturesque one.

Apart from Marguerite Clark, none of the players from the 1912 stage production repeated their roles in the film, but silent film enthusiasts will recognize two of the *Snow White* actors. Creighton Hale, playing Prince Florimond, was at the beginning of a long and busy career that included character roles in Griffith's *Way Down East* (1920) and *Orphans of the Storm* (1921), as well as a starring role in Paul Leni's *The Cat and the Canary* (1927). Dorothy Cumming, still 15 years away from her unforgettable performance as the bitter, vengeful wife in Victor Sjöström's *The Wind*, appears as Queen Brangomar.

In an interview with the *New York Telegraph* at the time of the film's release, director Dawley praised cameraman H. Lyman Broening for his camera effects, singling out the trick effect near the film's end in which a crown magically appears on Snow White's head. In the scene, the crown seems to appear gradually out of thin air, a cross-dissolve created by fading out on Snow White, winding the film back in the camera, and fading in again with the crown in place. Theoretically this shouldn't be a difficult procedure, and it's not the only such effect in the film. In this instance, Broening filmed it in long shot, on a stage crowded with players. In order for the transition to appear seamless on the screen, Marguerite Clark and *all* the players had to remain motionless while Broening faded out the first shot, stopped the camera and wound back the film, then faded in the second shot with the crown in place. "It is the first time, so far as I know," said Dawley, "that this double exposure trick has been employed with a whole stage full of people."

Part of *Snow White*'s appeal for audiences today is the role it played in later film history. At a special "movie party" presentation at Kansas City's huge Convention Hall in January 1917, it made a powerful impression on 15-year-old Walt Disney. Four prints of the film were projected on a giant four-sided screen suspended in the center of the hall, while an orchestra provided the musical accompaniment. Disney later cited the event as a factor in his selection of *Snow White* as the story for his first feature-length film. The two films seem at first to have nothing in common. The Paramount film abounds in supporting characters and subplots that wander far from both the Grimm and the Disney tellings. However, the alert viewer can spot visual motifs and ideas that may well have influenced young Walt.

Snow White disappeared from view after that first round of exhibition in 1916–17, and neither Disney nor anyone else saw it again for decades afterward. It was reportedly the victim of a vault fire that destroyed the negatives of all Marguerite Clark's Paramount films. Moreover, by the time of the fire, practically no prints of her films seemed to have survived. In one fell swoop, the film career of this lovely actress was virtually erased from history. Years afterward, film historians Edward Wagenknecht and DeWitt Bodeen wrote lyrically of Clark's sparkling screen presence in those lost films, Wagenknecht declaring that not having seen her was "like saying you have never seen a silver birch or a daffodil." For several generations, their written accounts remained only tantalizing reminders of the loss.

Then, in 1992, a tinted nitrate release print of *Snow White* with Dutch titles turned up in Amsterdam. A few scenes, notably the delivery of the infant Snow White to her parents by a comical stork, were missing, but the story was substantially complete and the picture quality was excellent. The print was returned to the United States and, with the support of the National Film Preservation Foundation, restored at George Eastman House. Thanks to their efforts, we can join the young Walt Disney—and the rest of a generation of 1916–17 moviegoers—in discovering this charming, reclaimed chapter of film history.

–J.B. Kaufman

MARGUERITE CLARK

THE BIGGEST AND LITTLEST LADY IN THE MOVIES

"Her skin was as white as snow, her cheeks as rosy as blood, and her hair as black as ebony...." These words from "Little Snow White" ("Sneewittchen" in German), a story from Grimms' collected fairy tales, could just as easily be describing Marguerite Clark, the first actress to portray the alabaster heroine in a feature-length motion picture.

Upon the release of *Snow White* (1916), the *San Francisco Chronicle* claimed "that this story … should have been put into film version in eight gorgeous and dazzling parts is one of the wonders of moviedom." In 1914, Famous Players had signed the four-foot-ten, 31-year-old Clark, a popular Broadway actress, soon after she had completed two seasons as Snow White on the stage. In the teens, film studios often looked to the theater for seasoned talent and paid handsomely to lure serious players to the screen. Douglas Fairbanks, Marie Dressler, Nazimova, and the Barrymores were among the Broadway players that signed on to the "flickers."

In a March 1916 issue of *Photoplay*, Clark spoke of being a practical woman, glad for the high paying work in the movies, but preferring the theater. "I am working simply and solely to earn my bread and butter, and my ambition is to find a good play… I shall remain in the pictures until I find one. You see how matter of fact I am. I confess that I really much prefer the stage to the pictures … After all, one loves to be able to talk."

Clark was born in Cincinnati on February 22, 1883. Orphaned at age 11, she was raised by her older sister Cora. At 14, she attended a convent school in St. Martin, Ohio. After graduation, a lucky break began her theatrical career, as she recalled in the April 1921 issue of England's *Picturegoer* magazine: "I suppose every girl who plays in amateur theatricals dreams of the night when the all-omnipotent manager from the great city will be a guest at the important function … One evening the dream came true, and when I was acting in a little charity affair, I heard it whispered that Milton Aborn had seen and had approved of my performance. And with Mr. Aborn I made my first real stage appearance one night in Baltimore, Maryland."

After a year in Baltimore, she and her sister Cora made their way to New York City. Beginning in 1900, she performed in 16 plays, six of which were starring roles, before embarking on a film career. Her first film for Famous Players was *Wildflower* (1914), directed by Allan Dwan, and she went on to star in almost 40 titles, reprising many of her stage roles, such as Little Eva in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (directed by *Snow White*'s J. Searle Dawley). Like Mary Pickford, she even starred in a 1918 short promoting war bonds, *The Biggest and Littlest Lady in the World*.

Both diminutive and known for playing young girls on stage and screen, "America's Sweetheart" and Clark were promoted as rivals by the press. Historian Daniel Blum wrote in 1953 that "Marguerite Clark was the only star who threatened [Pickford's] supremacy." During Clark's first year in movies, Pickford appeared in eight films to Clark's seven. Four years after her film debut, Clark was second only to Pickford in a 1918 Motion Picture Hall of Fame contest of Hollywood's top stars, outranking Douglas Fairbanks (in third place) and Charlie Chaplin (in 14th). After her retirement from film, Clark raised dogs, one of which she named "Mary Pickford."

When her six-year Famous Players contract expired, she formed her own production company under First National Pictures. The company's first film, *Scrambled Wives* (1921), turned out to be her last. She had planned to make a film or two each year, but after marrying Louisiana plantation owner and aviation entrepreneur Harry Palmerston Williams, she never performed again. "There comes a point when you can go no further and even if you have gone a long way life is empty without love. But there are no limits to happiness when you are married to the man you love." **–Aimee Pavy**

Marguerite Clark

THINK SLOW, ACT FAST: BUSTER KEATON SHORTS

Live Accompaniment by Donald Sosin on grand piano

ONE WEEK Cast Buster Keaton (The Groom), Sybil Seely (The Bride), Joe Roberts (Piano Mover) **Production** Buster Keaton Comedies 1920 **Producer** Joseph M. Schenck **Direction/Scenario** Edward F. Cline and Buster Keaton **Photography** Elgin Lessley **THE SCARECROW Cast** Buster Keaton (Farmhand), Sybil Seely (Farmer's daughter), Edward F. Cline (Hit-and-run truck driver), Joe Keaton (Farmer), Joe Roberts (Farmhand), Al St. John (Man with motorbike), Luke the Dog (The Dog) **Production** Buster Keaton Comedies 1920 **Producer** Joseph M. Schenck **Direction/Scenario** Edward F. Cline and Buster Keaton **Photography** Elgin Lessley **THE PLAYHOUSE Cast** Buster Keaton (Multiple characters), Virginia Fox (Twin), Edward F. Cline (Orangutan trainer), Joe Roberts (Actor/stagehand), Joe Murphy (One of the Zouaves) **Production** Buster Keaton Comedies 1921 **Producer** Joseph M. Schenck **Direction/Scenario** Edward F. Cline and Buster Keaton **Photography** Elgin Lessley **Print Source** Cohen Film Collection

Buster Keaton was born of vaudeville. His mother, the former Myra Edith Cutler, and father, Joseph Hallie Keaton—known simply as "Joe"—were knockabout comics on the late 19th century's medicine show circuit. Joe and Harry Houdini—later legendary as the ultimate escape artist and dedicated debunker of spiritualist charlatans—were partners in the Mohawk Indian Medicine Company. The traveling show featured Houdini's prestidigitation and the Keatons' raucous physical comedy. Keaton, named Joseph Frank on his birth certificate, always claimed that Houdini dubbed him "Buster" in 1897, when the then-two-year-old toddler hurtled head-over-heels down a flight of stairs, rising without a care or a scratch.

The boy was thrown into the Keatons' family act in 1899. The basic schtick involved the toddler's disobedience met by the father's physical violence. The young Keaton quickly learned how to fall, roll, take a punch, and, most importantly, keep an outward veneer of calm while suffering intense pain.

After nearly two decades of touring North America, the act broke up because of Joe Keaton's drinking. In 1917, Keaton, now 21 years old, met Roscoe "Fatty" Arbuckle, a vaudevillian who had become the most successful comedian in the motion picture business. Keaton, on his own since the family act's dissolution, asked Arbuckle if he could borrow a camera to learn how it worked. As legend has it, Keaton stayed up all night, disassembling and reassembling the apparatus, until he was certain he understood the magic of movies. History recounts that he returned the camera the next morning and asked Arbuckle for a job.

Together, Arbuckle and Keaton made 14 short subjects. Arbuckle left in 1920 to begin a brief career in feature films, leaving Keaton the sole star of the shorts series. In 1923, after making 45 other shorts under producer Joseph Schenck, Keaton transitioned to feature-length productions with *Three Ages*, a send-up of D.W. Griffith's bloated epic *Intolerance*. He went on to make ten more silent features.

The three shorts showing in Think Slow, Act Fast come from Keaton's own production unit, Buster Keaton Comedies, and testify to Keaton's uncanny ability to use an engineer's approach to building comedy.

One Week is the first film released by Keaton after becoming the primary creative force in Arbuckle's operation. A parody of *Home Made*, an instructional film produced in 1919 by the Ford Motor Company promoting prefabricated housing—a linchpin of America's suburban growth—*One Week* exaggerates the problems an amateur might encounter with a build-by-numbers

Buster Keaton portrait courtesy of Photofest

house. The young couple assembling their first home in a sub-development—actually the Metro Pictures studio lot—achieve epic levels of architectural disaster that Keaton accomplishes through mechanical wizardry, all of which he designed himself. There is very little camera trickery in this short, all the effects are mechanical, not photographic. For the malformed house to spin in the film's climax, it was mounted on a massive turntable.

The Scarecrow, also about the pitfalls of technology, presages the automatic kitchen via an elaborate Rube Goldberg apparatus. Offering a glimpse of the transformation of America's population from rural to suburban in the early 20th century, the film opens inside a single-room farmhouse outfitted with a profusion of labor-saving devices. State-of-the-art technologies like phonographs and natural gas are highlighted in a distinctly agrarian environment, complete with pigs, ducks, and cornfields. A chase sequence follows the progress of the moment, beginning on horseback, moving through a railroad yard, and ending on a motorcycle.

With *The Playhouse*, Keaton and his cameraman Elgin Lessley advanced the art of photographic effects with their mechanical ingenuity. On a single strip of 35mm film, they created shots with as many as nine images of Keaton interacting with his multiple selves. To achieve this effect, Lessley masked part of the camera lens, filmed Keaton's antics, then rewound the film to its original starting frame, moved the lens mask, then filmed the relocated Keaton again. This required precise timing for Keaton's performance, and excruciating accuracy for Lessley. Once they had begun, there was no way to correct any miscues or misplaced elements in the frame. Unfortunately, the show within the film features Keaton in blackface, a performance that modern audiences find objectionable. (Minstrel shows

were a standard element of 1920s live theater, and blackface performances did not entirely vanish from American entertainment until the 1960s.) Keaton and Lessley used the multiple exposures again, most notably in the 1924 feature *Sherlock, Jr.*

When the "talkies" came along, Keaton's days as a top box-office draw were numbered. He worked as a gag writer for MGM, he appeared in shorts at Columbia and Educational, he even went back to the stage. Far from forgotten, Keaton remained visible in the 1950s and '60s. He was Speedy Alka-Seltzer's comic foil in TV spots and print ads for the fizzy cure-all. He was one of many cameos in the epic 1963 comedy *It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World*. He joked alongside Frankie Avalon and Annette Funicello in four "Beach Party" movies, starting with *Pajama Party* in 1964. He is the reason for "Once Upon a Time," a nostalgic *Twilight Zone* episode. In it, Keaton is an ennui-afflicted janitor from the peaceful days of 1890 magically transported to the fabulous future of 1961, where he finds not Utopia, but traffic jams, smog, and noise pollution. The world of the late 19th century is delineated with out-of-tune piano music, title cards, and undercranked camerawork, producing the then-stereotypically "sped-up" look of silent movies.

For a long time, Keaton's silent-era films could only be seen on worn and scratchy prints muddied from several duplications and format changes circulating at colleges or the few revival houses; or on late-night television, scanned and broadcast from those same sorry film prints. Thankfully, restored versions of all his classic features and most of his noteworthy shorts are now available for home viewing. The availability of his films allows Keaton to continue as an inspiration to today's performers and filmmakers. Circus legend Geoff Hoyle often cites Keaton as an influence on his work. The godfather of Hong Kong action cinema, Jackie Chan—as renowned for performing his own stunts as Keaton was—told film critic Joe Leydon that "I just want that one day, when I retire, that people will still remember me like they remember Buster."

—Richard Hildreth

"ONCE MORE THE COMEDY CAPTURES A PROGRAM. AND IT'S A BUSTER KEATON AGAIN, TOO."

Buster Keaton and Sybil Seely in *One Week*, left. Buster Keaton and Luke the Dog in *The Scarecrow*, above

LOW COMEDY AS A HIGH ART

"THAT'S the one thing that I dread," Buster told me sadly. "I dread the day when we won't find another new wheeze to wrap up, when all the gags will have been sprung, when we're stumped for something new. That's what a comedian has to guard against: running out. That is why Charlie Chaplin makes his pictures so slowly. I know as a matter of fact that he takes thousands of feet of film on every picture, only to destroy it when he sees it in the projection room. And this carefulness is just what helps to make him a great artist."

Keaton is a master of snicker and guffaw technique. His art is to work up a situation deliberately, to build it as logically and as systematically as a carpenter builds a house. Gags, Buster told me, are natural or mechanical. "Both get laughs," he explained, "but the natural gag is the one we lay awake nights trying to dream of." And it is the mechanical gag that Keaton has mastered.

Take the situation in "The Boat," where, after having built a boat, he finds that he has not made the doorway large enough, and consequently, as the boat slides to the water, it pulls the shed down with it. Take the situation in "One Week." Buster has ordered a Sears-Roebuck bungalow for his bride-to-be. The wicked rival mixes the numerals on the various parts, and the comedy ensues when Buster attempts to assemble the jazzed sections.

This is mechanically perfect giggle material. But though one of the most adroit technicians of comedy, Buster fails to reach the heart, his pictures elude the sympathy.

It seems consistent to endow Chaplin with massive intellect, to read sermons into his capering feet. It is fairly simple to sympathize with the lovesick Harold Lloyd, upon occasion. But Keaton alone stands forth as the Trouper—unabashed, unaffected, unassuming, and—very like Shaw's *Undershaft*—unashamed!

"We just wrap up a little hokum," he will tell you. "We build up a little story on some sure-fire ideas, throw in a dozen gags, if we can think of 'em, and let 'er ride. The scenario we use is written on the correspondence end of a picture postcard. If it's lost it's no great matter."

You cannot read hidden *motifs* into the Keaton spoolings. You cannot persuade him that there was a hint of satire concealed in his last comedy, or the one before that. You cannot coerce him into admitting that he planned an unique characterization which he has steadfastly maintained. He will take credit for nothing. Not even his make-up.

"The pancake hat and the oversized collar and the misfit suit and the slapstick shoe are my old vaudeville stand-bys. My father rigged me out as a third of The Three Keatons, when I was too young to originate anything but a yowl. I've kept the same make-up ever since—guess I always will."

Solemnity is more than a habit with Keaton; it's ingrown. Throughout our conversation his face was stony. Nor was this an exception to his usual attitude. I have seen him in the turmoil of a comic sequence, a business of break-away ladders, swinging ropes, and trapdoor scaffoldings; I have seen him eying the pro-

ceedings at one of Manhattan's most energizing night clubs; I have seen him purring at his baby in fatherlike fashion; I have seen him casually viewing the day's rushes, and upon not one but all of these occasions Buster wore an expression that was infinitely more sphinxlike than the Sphinx ever thought of being. His is an entirely emotionless face, suggesting most of all, a mask. It is the ideal phiz for a droll pantaloon.

"You originated the idea of never smiling," I supposed.

But Buster refused to take credit for it. In the days of The Three Keatons, it seems, his father taught him never to crack a smile. The habit grew on him. Now it is so deeply rooted that it is almost impossible for him to grin.

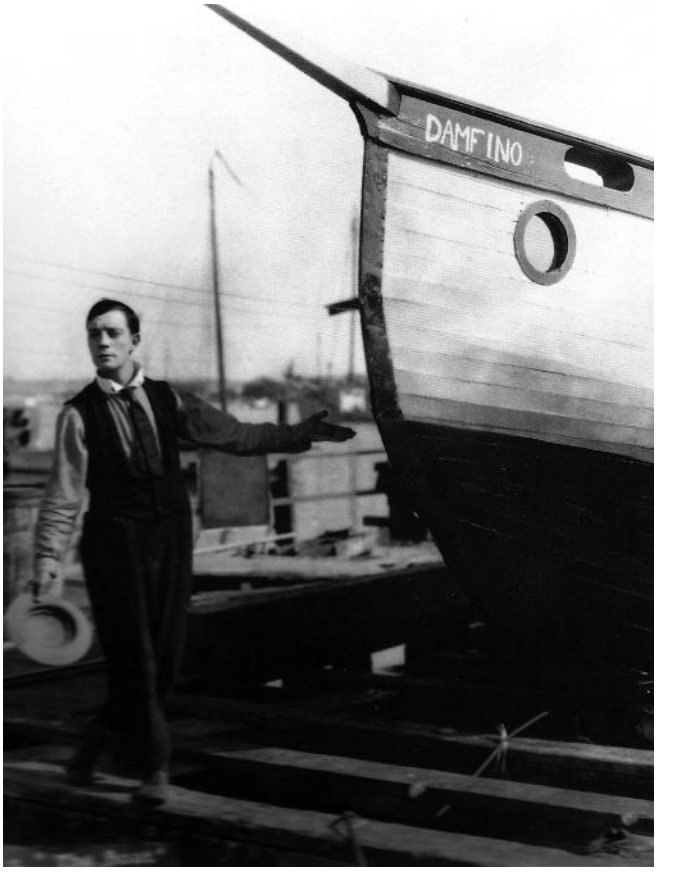
It has long been one of the beliefs of the American Credo that all comedians are, off stage, lugubrious fellows, and never was a truth more apparent than in the appearance and behavior of Buster Keaton. His countenance is little short of funereal, his speech laconic, his outlook none too sanguine.

"Next I'm going back to the Coast to do a five-reel picture. No plots, you know. Just gags. But we'll space our laughs. If we ran five reels of the sort of stuff we cram into two, the audience would be tired before it was half over. So we'll plant the characters more slowly, use introductory bits, and all that.

"It'll be just as easy to make a five-reeler, because we always take about fifteen reels, anyway. Now we'll cut to five instead of two."

Buster thinks "One Week" his best comedy, but he admits he had hoped to make "The Playhouse" his best. In that clever picture, he essayed a dozen or more rôles. He had intended doing all of the parts, but his ego failed him at the crucial moment.

Despite the fact that he is one of the big drawing cards, often featured in the lights, and billed above the longer picture of the program, Keaton has assumed no airs, adopted no pose. He denied that he made any preparation for a picture. He denied that he planned his plots. Try as you will, you cannot convince him that he is anything more than a trouper who manages to give 'em what they like. It is useless to talk to him of psychological effects.



"It's hokum," said Buster definitely and positively. "And by draping it in different styles you disguise it and bring results each time."

According to his lights, it is simply a case of old gags in new clothing. But if this were so, there would be more Keatons. Unfortunately enough, there aren't.

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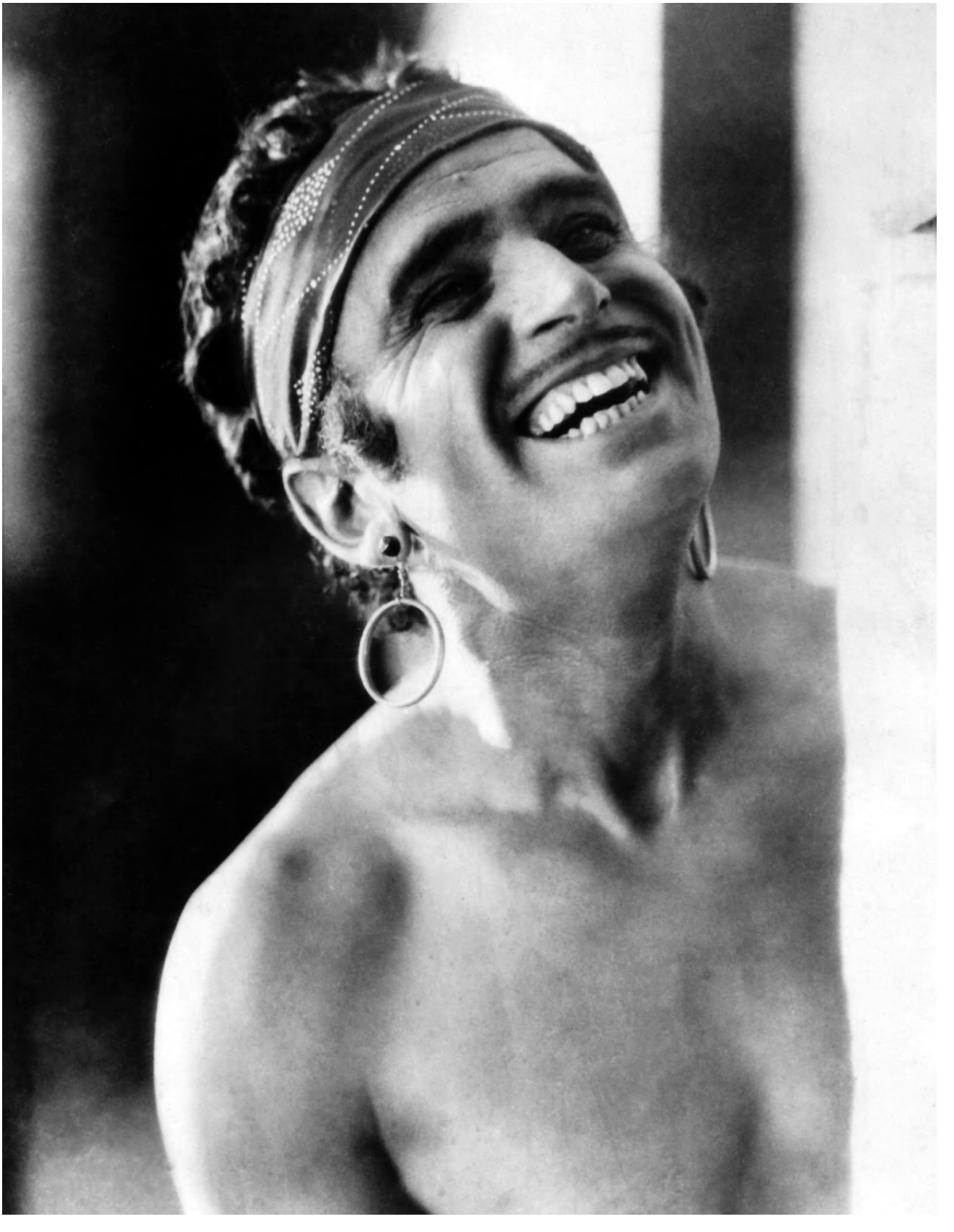
Excerpted from **"Low Comedy As a High Art: Comedians should not be taken for granted; give a thought to Chaplin, Keaton, and Lloyd—especially Buster,"** written by Malcolm H. Oettinger, published in the March 1923 issue of Picture-Play magazine

Buster Keaton in *The Boat*, above



THE THIEF OF BAGDAD

Live Accompaniment by Mont Alto Motion Picture Orchestra

Cast Douglas Fairbanks (Ahmed, the Thief of Bagdad), Snitz Edwards (His Evil Associate), Charles Belcher (The Holy Man), Julanne Johnston (The Princess), Anna May Wong (Mongol Slave), Winter-Blossom (Slave of the Lute), Etta Lee (Slave of the Sand Board), Brandon Hurst (Caliph), Tote Du Crow (His Soothsayer), Sôjin (Mongol Prince), K. Nambu (His Counselor), and Sadakichi Hartmann (His Court Magician), Noble Johnson (Indian Prince), Mathilde Comont (Persian Prince), Charles Stevens (His Awaker), Sam Baker (The Sworder) **Production** Douglas Fairbanks Pictures Corporation 1924 **Producer** Douglas Fairbanks **Director** Raoul Walsh **Story** Douglas Fairbanks, as Elton Thomas, inspired by *The Arabian Nights*, a.k.a. *A Thousand and One Nights* **Scenario Editor** Lotta Woods **Photography** Arthur Edeson **Costume Designer** William Cameron Menzies **Consulting Art Director** Irving J. Martin **Associate Artist** Anton Grot **Costume Designer** Mitchell Leisen **Research Director** Dr. Arthur Woods **Consultant** Edward Knoblock **Technical Director** Robert Fairbanks **Director of Mechanical Effects** Hampton Del Ruth **Production Manager** J. Theodore Reed **Editor** William Nolan **Print Source** Cohen Film Collection

An epic fantasy-spectacle inspired by *The Arabian Nights*, *The Thief of Bagdad* is Douglas Fairbanks's masterpiece. The superb visual design, spectacle, and special effects, along with his magnetic performance, all contribute to making it his greatest work. The film was not only his most ambitious effort but also one of the largest and most expensive made until that time. *The Thief of Bagdad* required 65 weeks to make, the sets covered six and a half acres at the Pickford-Fairbanks Studios in West Hollywood, and the prodigal production cost the enormous sum of $1,135,654.65.

Fairbanks's selection of the film's creative team was inspired, his most important choice being Raoul Walsh as director. He was confident of Walsh's capabilities in the coordination of the production and enjoyed his sense of humor; Walsh was an inveterate practical joker and Fairbanks loved practical jokes. Walsh's style and temperament were well suited to bring out the best in Fairbanks's narcissism and self-parody. The type of fantasy-spectacle Fairbanks envisioned was not Walsh's element, as the director later conceded. Fairbanks typically pushed his chosen directors far beyond what they thought they could achieve, and the results were often remarkable. However, Fairbanks was the real force both in front of and behind the camera, and he frequently took charge of the difficult scenes. A cinema auteur more than 30 years before the concept was developed, he put his own identifiable stamp on his films. Indeed, Walsh was hardly mentioned in the reviews for *The Thief of Bagdad*.

Fairbanks dances the part of Ahmed like a ballet dancer in the style of Nijinsky.

For art director, Fairbanks hired William Cameron Menzies but had already chosen the film's ethereal, spectacular setting in the early planning stages. He wanted the design to suggest the extravagance of imagination manifest in the *Arabian Nights* tales. Sergei Diaghilev's Ballets Russes had a great impact in America, as in Europe, defining modern dance in the early 20th century. Fairbanks also took his inspiration from *Scheherazade*, Diaghilev's great success, which was choreographed by Michel Fokine, danced by Nijinsky to the music of Rimsky-Korsakov, with costumes and décor by Léon Bakst. His thief is entirely different from the roles his audiences had come to expect from the all-American "Doug" Fairbanks. He dances the

part of Ahmed like a ballet dancer in the style of Nijinsky. Building on Bakst's ideas, Fairbanks, Walsh, Menzies, and the consulting artists developed the integrated curvilinear Art Nouveau design, which lifts the film into a soaring fantasy. Applied to the film's Art Nouveau décor, Menzies's pen-and-ink effects, which register like drawings onscreen, were revolutionary in American cinema. Prior to *The Thief of Bagdad*, set designs and décor in major films like D.W. Griffith's *Intolerance* (1916) were a tasteful mixture at best and in most cases a jumble. Menzies's sets for *The Thief of Bagdad* created an ethereal world of its own, with cast and setting melded in rhythm and motion.

Fairbanks also embraced the concepts of stylized performance and sets from contemporary German cinema. The Bagdad set was enormous; the bazaar set alone covered more than two acres, with a concrete floor four inches thick, which had to be re-enameled several times a week. Built upward and outward on the foundations of the *Douglas Fairbanks in Robin Hood* (1922) sets, Nottingham Castle was ingeniously transformed into the palace of Bagdad.

"The history of the movies is now David Wark Griffith, Douglas Fairbanks, and whoever rises hereafter to dispute their title."

Production of *The Thief of Bagdad* began on July 5, 1923, with non-stop work, excepting Sundays and Christmas Day. Shooting lasted a little more than 28 weeks. The post-production phase, which began February 1, 1924, went swiftly because of the meticulous preparations. William Nolan, the film editor, systematically cut the 480,000 feet of exposed film (shot on multiple cameras) down to about 15,000 feet for the final cut. Fairbanks hired the poet George Sterling to write the intertitles and give them a lyrical quality. Rather than follow the usual practice of compiling one from existing music, Fairbanks hired composer Mortimer Wilson to create an original musical score.

The world premiere of *The Thief of Bagdad* was held at the Liberty Theater in New York City on March 18, 1924. At great expense, Fairbanks hired Morris Gest, a master showman in the spirit of his father-in-law David Belasco, to oversee all the American road-show presentations of the film, which boasted "full scenic and stage effects, a band of Arabian musicians, with the instruments of their native country, as well as a Mohammedan Prayer Man." Fairbanks was active in all aspects of the exhibition and exploitation of his films, even down to details such as the number of billboards to reserve.

"It is an entrancing picture, wholesome and beautiful, deliberate but compelling, a feat of motion picture art which has never been equaled and one which itself will enthrall persons time and again," raved Mordaunt Hall in the *New York Times*. Hall made mention of Gest's elaborate presentation, the theater outfitted in "a thoroughly oriental atmosphere, with drums, vocal offerings, odiferous incense, perfume from Bagdad, magic carpets, and ushers in Arabian attire, who during intermission made a brave effort to bear cups of Turkish coffee to the women in the audience."

The *New York Herald Tribune* proclaimed *The Thief of Bagdad* "the greatest thing that ever has been put on the screen!" *Photoplay* magazine rhapsodized: "Here is magic. Here is beauty. Here is the answer to the cynics who give the motion picture no place in the family arts … It is a work of rare genius …." Robert E. Sherwood, future playwright and Fairbanks collaborator, wrote in *Life* magazine, "Fairbanks has gone far beyond the mere bounds of possibility; he has performed the superhuman feat of making his magic seem probable."

Poet Carl Sandburg wrote in the *Chicago Daily News*, "Probably no one photoplay since the motion picture business and art got going has been greeted

so enthusiastically in the circles known as highbrow and lowbrow." Like many others, Sandburg saw the film more than once; the following year he called it "a masterpiece." In 1926, the poet and film aesthetician Vachel Lindsay recommended seeing *The Thief of Bagdad* ten times, as he had; he called it "architecture-in-motion" and "sculpture-in-motion," two of Lindsay's own film aesthetic values on ample display in the film. "The history of the movies is now David Wark Griffith, Douglas Fairbanks, and whoever rises hereafter to dispute their title," Lindsay proclaimed.

Although the reviews were ecstatic, The *Thief of Bagdad* was not the commercial success that Fairbanks had anticipated. However, it remained Fairbanks's favorite of all his films. The Museum of Modern Art has kept the film in circulation for more than 70 years and a proliferation of lesser-quality reproductions of the film remain available as its copyright was not renewed. The film has enjoyed various revivals, notably at the Dominion Theatre in London in 1984 and at Radio City Music Hall in New York City in 1987 with a musical score by Carl Davis based on the compositions of Rimsky-Korsakov. This new DCP restoration, completed by the Cohen Film Collection in 2012, ensures that this great and enduring work of world cinema will be seen and enjoyed into the 21st century.

–Jeffrey Vance, adapted from his book DOUGLAS FAIRBANKS (UC Press, 2008)

THE MAGIC OF THE MAGIC CARPET

AMONG THE WONDERS OF

The Thief of Bagdad are the mechanical and special effects created by Hampton Del Ruth and Coy Watson, under the supervision of the film's technical director, Robert Fairbanks, brother of star and producer Douglas Fairbanks. Watson, who began his film career as a cowboy and worked as a props man in Mack Sennett's early Keystone comedies, was one of the first special effects artists in Hollywood. He helped to invent breakaway glass made of sugar and found numerous uses for strong, thin piano wire in stunts and gags, earning him the nickname "Fire, Wire and Water Watson," according to an affectionate memoir by his son Coy Jr. (one of several of Watson's nine children who became child actors).

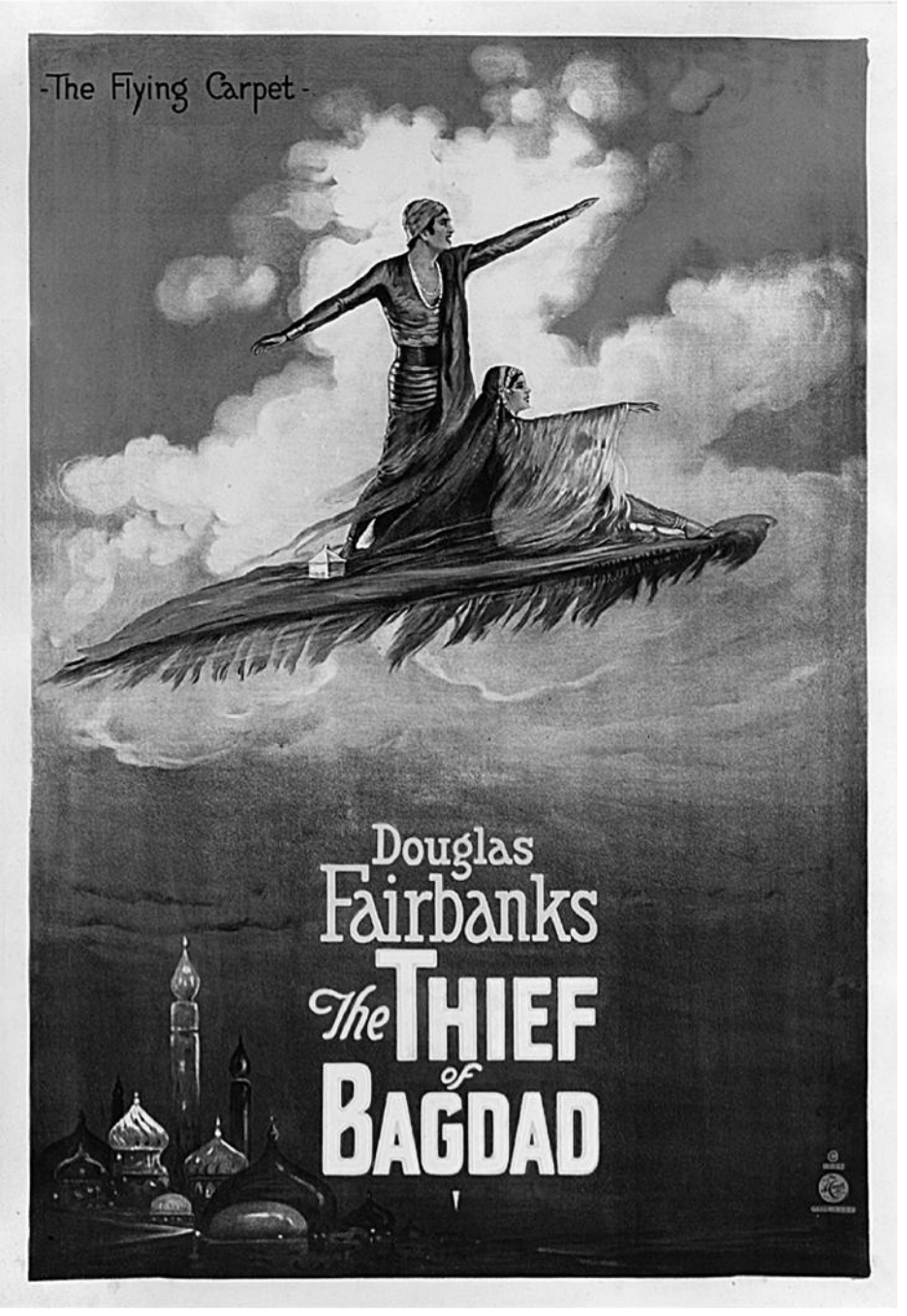
The most impressive effect in *The Thief of Bagdad* is the flying carpet. Director Raoul Walsh took credit for the idea in his own memoir, claiming he thought of it when he passed a construction site and saw some construction workers riding a load of girders being hoisted up by a large crane. But it was Watson and his trusty piano wire that executed it. According to film historian Jeffrey Vance, the crane was 90 feet high with platforms for the camera operators. The carpet was a flat piece of steel covered in a Persian carpet with long fringe to conceal the platform. Six sets of sturdy wires were attached to the frame and held up by the crane. Each set of wires could hold 300 pounds. An overhead pulley and a hand winch, just off camera, lifted the carpet and moved it at about 25 miles an hour, a brisk speed. Undercranking the cameras made the carpet appear to be moving even faster. The film's finale, with the carpet flying out of the palace, into the city, and off in the clouds, was shot with 18 cameras simultaneously covering all the angles and all the action.

The close-ups of Fairbanks and Julanne Johnston (who played the princess) on the carpet were shot against a blank screen and double-exposed on a background of clouds. The same effect was used for the flying horse scene, with a real horse running on a treadmill against a screen. The wings were attached and moved by wires, and Fairbanks was double-exposed in. Piano wire also held up the magic rope that Fairbanks climbs and manipulated the giant spider's limbs. The film's special effects were so innovative that *Science and Invention* magazine published a two-page spread, "The Mechanical Marvels of *The Thief of Bagdad*" in May of 1924.

While the famously fit Fairbanks—who exercised every day at a gym on the lot, which had a sign reading "Basilica Linea Abdominalis" (Waistline Temple)—performed his own stunts, he did get a bit of help. In an early scene where he dodges pursuers by jumping in and out of a series of large jars, the jars had trampolines inside, allowing him to make those spectacular leaps. When he rides a bucking horse and is tossed into the rosebush, he wore a belt attached to wires with which Watson pulled him off the horse and catapulted him neatly into the bush. Watson told his son that when Fairbanks was attached to the wires, "He liked to clown, pretending to fly and do impossible gymnastic tricks as he swung himself through the air. This caused Dad concern and he often had to remind Doug that he was not rigged to do circus stunts and he was playing without a net below!"

Two years later, Fairbanks again tapped Coy Watson to help with special effects on *The Black Pirate*, creating another memorable Fairbanks moment, his slide down the sail of a ship. Again, with a little help from some piano wire.

—Margarita Landazuri



Poster art courtesy of Walter Reuben

MY BEST GIRL

Live Accompaniment by Donald Sosin on the grand piano

Cast Mary Pickford (Maggie Johnson), Charles Rogers (Joe Grant), Sunshine Hart (Ma Johnson), Lucien Littlefield (Pa Johnson), Carmelita Geraghty (Liz Johnson), Hobart Bosworth (Robert Merrill), Evelyn Hall (Esther Merrill) **Production** Mary Pickford Corporation 1927 **Producer** Mary Pickford **Director** Sam Taylor **Scenario** Allen McNeil and Tim Whelan **Story** Hope Loring, adapted from the 1927 novel by Kathleen Norris **Comedy Assistant** Clarence Hennecke **Photography** Charles Rosher **Art Direction** Jack Schulze **Print Source** UCLA Film and Television Archive, courtesy of Milestone Films

On June 21, 1928, less than a year after the release of her final silent film, *My Best Girl*, Mary Pickford walked into Charles Bock's salon in New York City for a haircut. The Girl with the Golden Curls needed a change. So, at her request, Bock clipped 12 long ringlets from perhaps the most famous head on Earth and gave her a wavy Jazz Age bob. Two days later, a front-page headline in the *New York Times* read, "Mary Pickford Secretly Has Her Curls Shorn; Forsakes Little-Girl Roles to Be Grown Up."

This was not the first time Pickford had expressed a desire to leave behind her image as America's Sweetheart and play more sophisticated roles. In 1923, she brought Ernst Lubitsch from Germany and planning began for *Marguerite and Faust*, a part that would require her trademark innocence and a dark side. When Pickford's mother and business partner found out that Marguerite strangles her bastard child, she was horrified, telling Lubitsch: "Not my daughter! No sir!" According to Pickford biographer Eileen Whitfield, the project was scrapped in favor of *Rosita*, about a saucy Spanish street singer who defies a king. The *New York Times* called it "exquisite" and *Variety* praised "a Mary Pickford different and greater than at any time in her screen career."

FANS LOVED PICKFORD BEST WHEN HER CHARACTER TEMPERS PATHOS WITH WHIMSY.

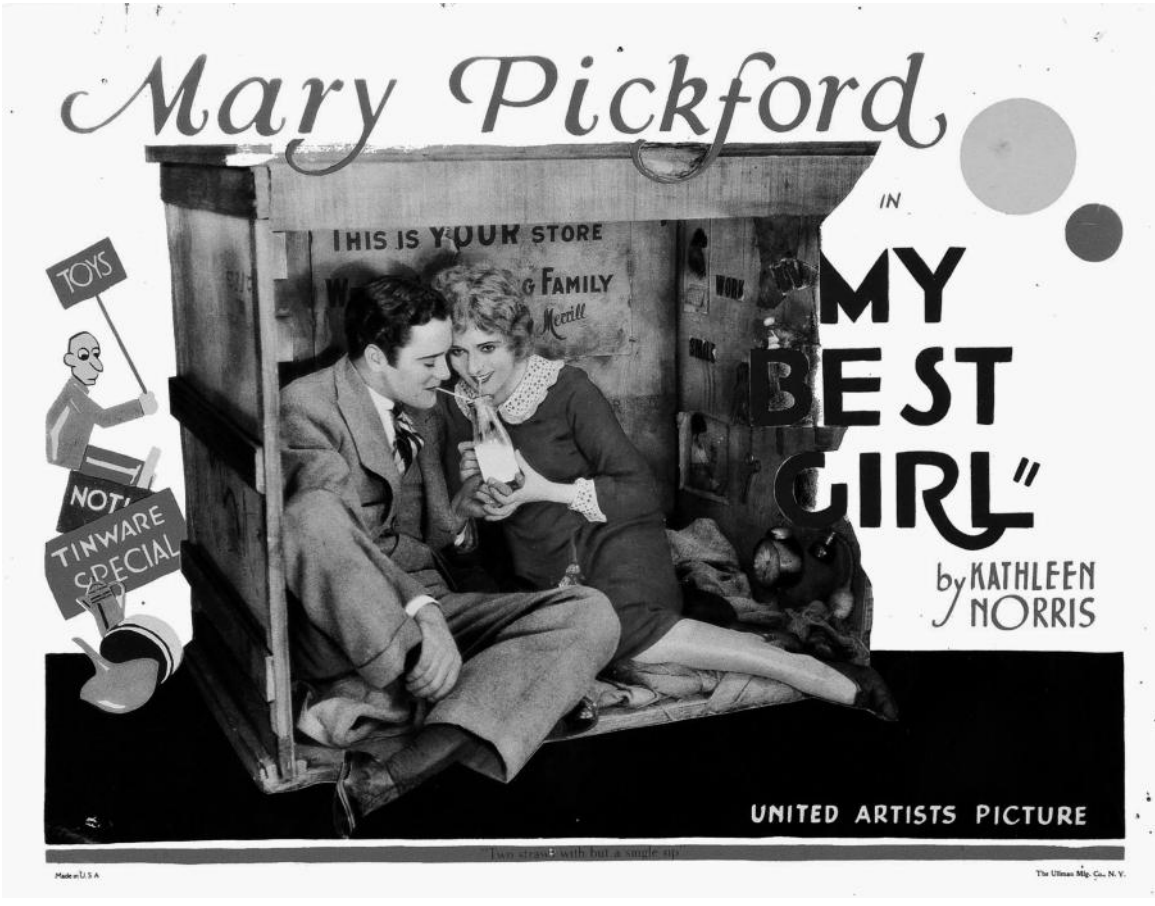
Pickford, who initially liked it, later called *Rosita* not only the worst film she'd made but the worst she'd ever seen. Yet, she still wanted to pursue grown-up roles, telling the *New York Tribune* that she "felt strangled by my own curls," and craved "something wicked." Her next picture was a period drama about an Elizabethan noblewoman who marries against her father's wishes. *Dorothy Vernon of Haddon Hall* pleased neither Pickford nor her fans. In her 1955 memoir *Sunshine and Shadow*, she recalled, "I was quite ready to surrender to public demand and become a child again." And she did, drastically so, starring in 1925's *Little Annie Rooney* about a 12-year-old street tough. She was 33 years old.

Pickford had won the hearts of movie audiences playing defiant urchins and orphans across her 24-year career. (The descriptive "little" appears in nine out of her more than 50 feature film titles). But she also displayed incredible range, playing tragic women (*Madame Butterfly*), plain women (Unity Blake in *Stella Maris*, in which she had a dual role), and women capable of defending themselves and others (the savior of orphans in *Sparrows*). Fans loved Pickford best when her character tempers pathos with whimsy, as in *Through the Back Door* when she straps a pair of scrub brushes to her feet and skates the floor clean.

When Pickford began in pictures, in 1909, it was strictly a make-ends-meet proposition for the teenage stage actress who looked down on the "flickers." She soon found it was her métier. The medium was nascent, business was decentralized (though located primarily on the East Coast), and there were no stars, no name actors, actresses, directors. Producers wanted to keep salaries low, so their players remained anonymous, pliable, and poorly compensated. Pickford changed all that. In 1909 and 1910, she made 74 short films at Biograph Studios under D.W. Griffith, then defining the grammar of American narrative cinema. She supplanted Florence Lawrence as the new Biograph Girl and fans identified her as "Little Mary." In 1912, a year before Pickford signed with Adolph Zukor's Famous Players and made her first feature, the press had dubbed her "Queen of the Movies."

In 1914, she made the hit *Tess of the Storm Country*, the film she considered the real beginning of her career. She cultivated the rise of director Marshall Neilan and favored screenwriter Frances Marion. In 1917, she began a 19-film collaboration with cameraman Charles Rosher, who said he "kept hairpins by the camera" in case he need to rearrange Pickford's curls. Shooting *Poor Little Rich Girl* that same year, Maurice Tourneur improvised the first "baby spot" so Pickford could more convincingly play the neglected Gwendolyn.

Aided by her indomitable mother at the negotiating table, she became the first actress to have her own production company. At 24 years old, she had the right to choose her writers and directors, had approval over advertising, and could pocket half the receipts. Most significantly, however, her films were to be released apart from the block-booking distribution



practices of Paramount, which bundled good, mediocre, and bad films for exhibitors. Three years later, she had the prescience to align herself with three of Hollywood's biggest names—Douglas Fairbanks, Charlie Chaplin, D.W. Griffith—and, through United Artists, controlled her career completely. Years afterward, Rosher summed up Pickford's skills to historian Kevin Brownlow: "She knew everything there was to know about motion pictures."

In *My Best Girl*, she displays her wide range as an actress, from the charming innocent trying to get by to the grown woman capable of deep emotion. While Pickford still possesses the long locks so intrinsic to her movie persona, they are pinned up the entire film. She takes advantage of her diminutive stature to comic effect, charming everyone as she'd done since her Biograph shorts, and performs her first extended love scene on film. The photography by Charles Rosher, particularly in the traffic scenes, reflect the work he had just completed for F.W. Murnau's *Sunrise*. For Pickford's close-ups, he used a lens he had developed in Germany, which gives what he called "a stereoscopic quality."

My Best Girl opened on October 21, 1927, two weeks after *The Jazz Singer* made its premiere. As powerful a force as she had been in the invention of the Hollywood and movie culture itself, Pickford could not control the coming of sound. She waited more than a year to make her first talkie, and first film without her crowning glory. *Coquette* was released in the spring of 1929 and a grateful industry gave her an Academy Award. For her next talkie, she paired up with Fairbanks for an adaptation of Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew*. Her final screen appearance was in Frank Borzage's *Secrets* (1933), about a wife beset by a philandering husband, which, according to Pickford confidante Frances Marion, was a thinly veiled swipe at Fairbanks, then cavorting in Europe with his soon-to-be-third wife.

Pickford, all her characters finally grown-up, retired from the screen, later explaining, "When [Chaplin] discarded the Little Tramp, the Little Tramp turned around and killed him. I wasn't waiting for the little girl to kill me." She remarried (to *My Best Girl* costar Buddy Rogers), did radio shows, wrote a novel and her memoirs. She produced her last film in 1950 and sold her shares in United Artists in 1956.

Pickford also became an accidental film collector. She spent many years hunting down and purchasing as many copies of her films as she could find—so they could be destroyed after her death. Luckily, her longtime friend, actress Lillian Gish, talked her out of it and Pickford, whose collection comprised one and a half million feet of film spanning the history of early narrative cinema, leaves behind a legacy that encompasses both the medium's creation and its preservation.

—Shari Kizirian

Mary Pickford and Charles "Buddy" Rogers

Pickfair

INVENTING CELEBRITY

"Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford were a living proof of America's belief in happy endings."

When Mary Pickford met Douglas Fairbanks in 1915, she was already "America's Sweetheart," one of the most popular movie stars in the world, and he was a Broadway star just starting to make his mark in motion pictures. According to Pickford's autobiography, Fairbanks won her over by telling her, "you do less apparent acting than anyone else I know, and because of that, you express more." It was the film business that drew them together and cemented their union. By the time they married more than four years later, they were both at the top of their profession and completely in charge of their own careers. They had become not only the first superstar couple, but also the first actors to become power players in Hollywood.

Although she was the highest paid woman in America, earning $2000 dollars a week, Pickford chafed at the control that Famous Players studio head Adolph Zukor had over her career. When her contract expired in 1916, she negotiated a new one that guaranteed her one million dollars over the course of two years and her own production unit. A separate company, Artcraft, was created to distribute her films. By the end of the year, Fairbanks, whose film career was booming, set up his own production company under Zukor, also with distribution by Artcraft.

At the same time, the couple's secret affair was intensifying, although both were married to others. They hesitated to divorce, worried that it might affect their popularity, yet they remained fearless in their pursuit of professional independence. In early 1919, Pickford, Fairbanks, Charles Chaplin, and director D.W. Griffith joined forces to take control of the distribution as well as the production of their films through the collectively owned United Artists. Chaplin and Griffith set up their own studios; Pickford and Fairbanks bought a single property to house their respective companies. There, for the next decade, they turned out hit after hit.

Their professional lives in order, Pickford and Fairbanks finally wed in March of 1920. Following a European honeymoon during which the newlyweds were greeted by adoring mobs, the king and queen of the movies sailed home to their remote hilltop castle. In the previous decade, Hollywood had grown from a sleepy village to a bustling company town, but locals still looked down on movie people, and there were

Courtesy of the Rob Brooks Collection

only two hotels where they could hold parties and dances. Once Pickford and Fairbanks married, they helped invent the lavish celebrity lifestyle that made Hollywood famous.

Shortly before their wedding, Fairbanks had bought an 18-acre hunting lodge in the sparsely settled outpost of Beverly Hills. He hired architect Wallace Neff to redesign it into a 22-room Tudor mansion. A press agent probably dubbed the estate "Pickfair," but its proud owners quickly adopted the name and emblazoned it on the graceful gates. The estate took five years to complete. The rooms were large and sunny with stunning views. There were stables and horses, and a sandy beach ringed a swimming pool so huge that Pickford and Fairbanks were photographed canoeing in it. The gregarious Fairbanks loved to be surrounded by people, and an invitation to Pickfair quickly became a mark of social success among the film colony. Other stars soon followed their migration to Beverly Hills.

Pickfair's guests included not only the film industry's upper echelons, but also business leaders like Henry Ford, intellectuals such as Albert Einstein, and European nobility. The couple took frequent trips abroad, and jealous rivals sniped that their sole purpose was to line up titled houseguests for the following season. Royal visitors included the King and Queen of Siam, Britain's Lord and Lady Mountbatten, and the Duke of York (later King George VI). Fairbanks especially enjoyed hosting sports stars like Babe Ruth and tennis great Bill Tilden. Yet for all Pickfair's splendor, the insecurities of the owners sometimes showed through.

Pickford associated steam heat with the shabby rooming houses she had lived in during her itinerant theatrical childhood, so the great mansion was unheated. Fairbanks was very possessive and did not allow Pickford to dance with anyone else, bragging that the Duke of York had once asked her to dance and she had refused. The couple always sat next to each other at dinner, both at home and when out with others, often disrupting carefully planned seating arrangements. Some of the guests found Pickfair gatherings stuffy or boring, especially since Fairbanks was a teetotaler and the couple served no liquor. Actress Miriam Cooper, then married to director Raoul Walsh, later recalled, "We'd go all dressed up, and sit down at this huge table with the lovely china and servants falling all over themselves serving you, and not even one lousy drop of wine."

By the time Pickford and Fairbanks divorced in 1936, both their acting careers were effectively over, although Pickford remained active in United Artists for two more decades. She put Pickfair up for sale and, for a time, it was rumored that it would be turned into a museum. However, even after marrying her third husband Charles "Buddy" Rogers and taking up residence in his home briefly, Pickford could not give up the great house and eventually the couple returned there for the rest of her life. When Pickford received an honorary Oscar in 1976, a camera wandered through the halls of Pickfair like the ghosts of those who had partied there, coming to rest on a tiny, diminished Pickford sitting in an oversized, throne-like chair.

After Pickford's death in 1979, Rogers sold Pickfair to the owner of the Los Angeles Lakers. After buying it in 1988, starlet Pia Zadora tore down the house, claiming it was infested with termites, and built a Venetian palazzo in its place. It was eventually sold to a Korean-born tech mogul who later put it on the market for $60 million. There were no takers, and it is now used occasionally for corporate events. Wrought-iron scrollwork on the gates still reads "Pickfair."

British-American journalist Alistair Cooke once observed, "Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford came to mean more than a couple of married film stars. They were a living proof of America's belief in happy endings." Even if the marriage did not have the fairy-tale happily ever after, the couple's enormous legacy is evident in the current fascination with celebrity romance and lifestyle but, more substantially, in those creative artists who take control of their careers, take risks, and reap the rewards of fame and talent.

–Margarita Landazuri

FAUST

Live Accompaniment by Christian Elliott on the Mighty Wurlitzer

Cast Gösta Ekman (Faust), Emil Jannings (Mephisto), Camilla Horn (Gretchen), Frieda Richard (Gretchen's mother), Wilhelm Dieterle (Valentin, Gretchen's brother), Yvette Guilbert (Marte, Gretchen's aunt), Eric Barclay (Duke of Parma), Hanna Ralph (Duchess of Parma), Archangel (Werner Fuetterer) **Production** Ufa 1926 **Original Language Title** *Faust, Eine deutsche Volkssage* **Producer** Erich Pommer **Director** F.W. Murnau **Scenario** Hans Kyser, adapted from Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's play **Photography** Carl Hoffmann **Art Direction** Robert Herlth and Walter Röhrig **Print Source** Kino Lorber

Friedrich Wilhelm Plumpe, known forever to gods and mortals as F.W. Murnau, is a towering figure in cinema's pantheon. Unfortunately, *Nosferatu* (1922), *The Last Laugh* (1924), and *Sunrise* (1927)—the masterpiece he made upon his arrival in Hollywood—have come to overshadow the rest of the director's equally impressive oeuvre, especially *Faust*, his wondrous and haunting final film made in Germany.

Another director, Ludwig Berger, had been planning to make Goethe's cautionary fable from his own script, with Conrad Veidt as Mephisto. But Emil Jannings, who had followed his triumph in *The Last Laugh* with the title role in Murnau's *Tartuffe*, wanted the iconic part—and to continue working with his beloved director. Then as now, movie stars often got their way. In this case, the audience was the primary beneficiary.

Murnau convened a trusted and familiar cadre of collaborators, beginning with art director Robert Herlth. Carl Hoffmann, whom Murnau had worked with on his first films in 1919 and 1920, took the key position of cameraman after Karl Freund suffered a broken leg. The poet and filmmaker Hans Kyser adapted the story of a bet between an angel and Mephisto. The devil makes his opportunistic play when a desperate scholar named Doctor Faust loses his faith during the plague. The two strike a deal, but the devious Mephisto soon tempts Faust into another transaction that, ultimately and inevitably, has the direst implications.

A renowned international cast was led by the incomparable Jannings, with the Swedish star Gösta Ekman as the title character. In the role of Gretchen (known in English as Marguerite), Camilla Horn made her screen debut in the part originally intended for Lillian Gish. The American star's insistence on bringing her own cameraman from Hollywood, Charles Rosher, had been a deal-breaker for the studio. (Rosher had already left the U.S. for Berlin and ended up spending the shoot watching from the sidelines and answering Murnau's questions about making films in Hollywood. The experience paid off the following year, when Rosher and Karl Struss shot *Sunrise* and shared the

Emil Jannings and Gösta Ekman

first Academy Award for cinematography.) Valentin is played by one Wilhelm Dieterle, who later established himself as a prolific contract director in Hollywood (*Fog Over Frisco* and *Dark City*, among countless titles) as William Dieterle.

Years later, many of these artists could vividly recall the myriad ways that working with Murnau was special. Herlth, who collaborated with Murnau on four films, remembered meeting with him to discuss a sequence for *The Last Laugh*. When Herlth asked about the placement of doors and furniture, Murnau replied with an ironic smile. "A plan? That would be like in the theater. The cinema is a matter of projection. You either see something or you don't; all that matters is the impression."

That profound understanding of visual storytelling, in addition to a practiced talent for directing actors, was apparent in Murnau's revisions of Kyser's script for *Faust*. For one key juncture in the story, Kyser wrote, "Without a moment's hesitation, Faust snatches the pact away from him, goes to a table, and picks up a pen." Here is Murnau's improvement: "Faust looks at him fixedly. Then he takes the pact from him as if hypnotized, and still as if under the effect of hypnosis, gropes behind him for the pen."

Murnau was not a technical wizard; he relied on his collaborators to devise equipment and effects to achieve what he wanted to see onscreen and rarely, if ever, looked through the camera. Some critics claim that his screenwriters, cameramen, and set designers, therefore, deserve the lion's share of the credit for his films. In her passionately and admirably researched *Murnau*, published in Paris in 1964 and translated into English in 1973, Lotte H. Eisner maintains that the director's annotated screenplays provide proof that he was the guiding force and overriding visual architect of his works.

Murnau had chosen his collaborators for their ingenuity, resourcefulness, and dedication, and they consistently came up with creative ways of achieving the necessary visual effects. For a shot of the archangel waving his flaming sword in the heavens, Herlth built a gadget that shot steam out of several pipes. When the vaporous columns were lit against a backdrop of clouds, they looked like rays of sunlight. Murnau was so delighted with the effect that he lost track of time, until he realized Werner Fuetterer was so exhausted from rehearsing that he couldn't lift the sword.

"SOMETIMES THE STUDIO WOULD BE FULL OF STIFLING SMOKE: OLD FILM WAS BEING BURNT IN THE DOORWAY TO CREATE A DENSER ATMOSPHERE, AND WITHOUT THE SLIGHTEST CONCERN ABOUT FIRE!"

Herlth, the art director, never forgot a succinct lesson that Murnau taught him one day. "Art consists in eliminating," Murnau said. "But in the cinema it would be more correct to talk of 'masking.' For just as you and [co-designer Walter] Röhrig suggest light by drawing shadows, so the cameraman ought to create shadow too. That's much more important than creating light!"

Murnau understood that cinema consisted of light (and shadow) and movement (by actors and objects but also by the camera). The detail-oriented director knew what he wanted; after all, he had labored during pre-production to resolve the thematic, plot, and aesthetic questions. Getting the shots to work in production, however, was a different matter.

"We had to keep renewing the sheets of parchment for Faust's pact with the devil, which had to be written in letters of fire," assistant art director Arno Richter recalled. "Just before each take the parchment had the letters printed on it with a sort of stamp which applied threads of asbestos and a liquid which ignited spontaneously and immediately. This shot was taken

over and over again for a whole day: the sheets of parchment kept catching light too soon or burning too fast. They were heaped up in hundreds outside the studio. But Murnau persevered until at last he got the pact with the devil successfully filmed."

It was an era of experimentation and problem solving; in some ways, the set was a laboratory. Richter remembered, "Sometimes the studio would be full of stifling smoke: old film was being burnt in the doorway to create a denser atmosphere, and without the slightest concern about fire!"

Murnau was a tireless perfectionist, and there were long days when laughs were scarce. Indeed, the stunning scene in *Faust* where Mephisto brings the plague on the city was only achieved with significant suffering on the part of the crew and Emil Jannings. Outfitted with wings and feathers, the actor had to stand for hours on an iron grill above three massive fans blowing his cloak 12 feet in the air. At the same time, Jannings was inundated with soot (the visual manifestation of the plague) propelled across the set—and beyond—by another high-powered blower.

"What we, Murnau's team of collaborators, were afraid of then was that there was nothing new left for us to achieve," Herlth later recalled. "But in the course of making *Tartuffe* and *Faust* we came to realize that we were only at the beginning."

In many ways, despite his great successes to that point, so was Murnau. His relocation to Hollywood and then to Tahiti to make *Tabu: A Story of the South Seas* heralded more masterpieces to come. We still mourn his premature death, in 1931, on a winding coastal road in Southern California.

–Michael Fox

Emil Jannings

THE GERMAN FILMS OF F.W. MURNAU

Der Knabe in blau* (The Blue Boy, 1919) About a man's fascination with the Thomas Gainsborough painting. 35 single-shot fragments survive at Deutsche Kinemathek.

Satanas* (1919–20) Episodic film in three parts: "The Tyrant: A Tragedy of the Pharaohs"; "The Prince: Lucrezia Borgia's Death"; "The Conqueror: The Fall of a Tribune." In advertising, Robert Wiene named as director with Murnau as assistant. A fragment is preserved at Filmoteca Espanola.

Sehnsucht* (Desire: The Tragedy of Dancer, 1920) About a Russian violinist, played by Conrad Veidt. Working title was originally *Pagliacci*.

Der Bucklige und die Tänzerin* (The Hunchback and the Dancer, 1920) Carl Mayer wrote the original script as *The Green Kiss*.

Der Januskopf* (The Janus Head, 1920) Based on Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case* of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, but using different character names to avoid paying royalties.

Abend–Nacht–Morgen* (Evening, Night, Morning, 1920). From the Decla studio's detective films unit.

Der Gang in die Nacht (Journey Into the Night, 1921) Earliest surviving film. Shows influence of Scandinavian naturalistic cinema on Murnau; adapted from a play by Danish author and screenwriter Harriet Bloch.

Marizza, Genannt die Schmuggler-Madonna* (Marizza, Called the Smuggler's Madonna, 1920–21) Premiered in 1922 at a theater near Murnau's house in Berlin. 13-minute surviving fragment from the first reel screened at Pordenone 2010.

Schloss Vogelöd (The Haunted Castle, 1921) Based on novel by Rudolf Stratz being serialized at the time in a Berlin newspaper. First film role for Russian-born Olga Tschechowa.

Nosferatu, Eine Symphonie des Grauens (Nosferatu, Symphony of Horrors, 1922) The premiere featured a gala called, *The Feast of Nosferatu*, at which Ernst Lubitsch was reported to have been "swinging with admirable temperament and stamina on the dance floor."

Der Brennende Acker (The Burning Earth, 1922) Long thought lost, a color nitrate print turned up in Milan in the possession of a Jesuit priest. Restored in 1993.

Phantom (1922) Based on the novel by Nobel prize-winner Gerhart Hauptmann, the film premiered at Ufa Palast Am Zoo in celebration of the author's 60th birthday.

Die Austreibung* (The Expulsion, 1923) Subtitled, *The Power of the Second Wife*. Based on the 1905 play by Carl Hauptmann.

Die Finanzen des Grossherzogs (The Finances of the Grand Duke, 1924) A rare Murnau comedy; script written by frequent collaborator Thea von Harbou.

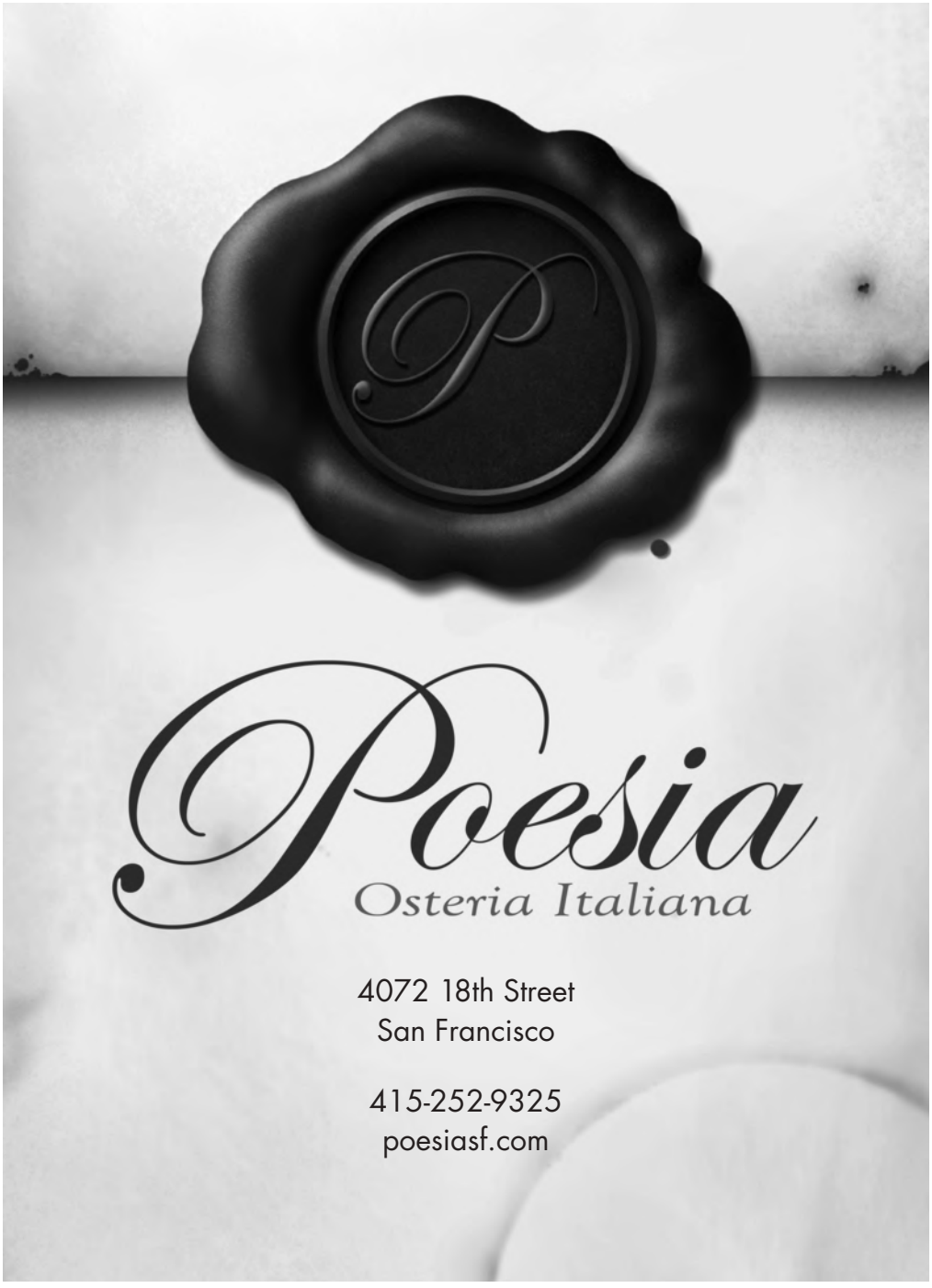
Der letzte Mann (The Last Man, 1924) Celebrated for use of the "unchained camera." Producer Erich Pommer insisted on a happy ending. Released January 1925 in the U.S. as *The Last Laugh*.

Tartüff (Tartuffe, 1926) Based on the Molière play, *Tartuffe ou l'Imposteur*. First film appearance of Camilla Horn; she doubles for Lil Dagover's legs.

Faust, Eine deutsche Volkssage (Faust, A German Folk Tale, 1926) F.W. Murnau convinced MGM to let him produce the American release and he carried the original negative with him to Hollywood. By the time of *Faust*'s Berlin premiere, Murnau is no longer in Germany.

*Considered lost

From top:
Schloss Vogelöd
Die Finanzen des Grossherzogs
Der letzte Mann
Tartüff
Images courtesy of Kino Lorber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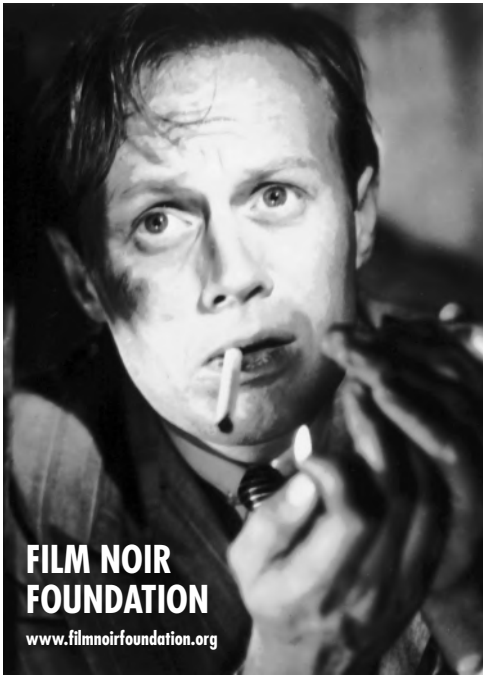

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Theater Keith Arnold, Brian Collette, Mark Gantor, Gary Olive, and the rest of the Castro Theatre staff. Special Thanks to Jeff Root and the Castro's projection staff. Special thanks to Ray Taylor, Dick Taylor, and Edward Millington Stout III who maintain the Castro's magnificent Mighty Wurlitzer organ.

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Elaina Archer, Daniel Bish, Buck Bito, Annelle Brickley, Rob Brooks, Frank Buxton, Rob Byrne, Francesco d'Ippolito, Rena Dein, Dennis Doros, Suzanne Drexhage, Sabine Erlenwein, Jesse Hawthorne Ficks, Pam Garcia, Jaime Galli, Nigel Gilchrist, Tracey Goessel, Carter Gunn, David Harding, Julie Harris, Amy Heller, Steven Hill, Emily Hoover, Joan Hull, Kate Johnson, Vince Johnson, Nancy Kauffman, Mike Keegan, Liz Keim, Tim Lanza, Karen Larsen, Mariana Lopez, Joe Mader, Jonathan Marlow, Mike Mashon, Abby McKee, Annette Melville, Jennifer Miko, Buffy and George Miller, Caitlin Moneypenny-Johnston, Peter Moore, Don Nasser, Niles Essanay Silent Film Museum, Liz Ogilvie, Susan Oxtoby, Gary Palmucci, Christy Pascoe, Walter Reuben, Jessica Rosner, Mark Sandberg, Samuel Sharkey, Judy and Wylie Sheldon, Brian Springer, Emily Suther, Joslyn Thoresen, Jennifer Una, Jeffrey Vance, Fua Veu, Michael Wade, David Wells, Ken White, Todd Wiener, Shelley Wood

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