

True art transcends time.



SAN FRANCISCO  
**SILENT**  
FILM FESTIVAL

May 30 - June 3, 2018

*The* CASTRO THEATRE



# W

elcome to the San Francisco Silent Film Festival for five days and nights of live cinema!

This is SFSFF's twenty-third year of sharing revered silent-era

masterpieces and newly revived discoveries as they were meant to be experienced—with live musical accompaniment. We've even added a day, so there's more to enjoy of the silent-era's treasures, including features from nine countries and inventive experiments from cinema's early days and the height of the avant-garde.

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, screening these films with accompaniment by the world's foremost practitioners of putting live sound to the picture.

Showcasing silent-era titles, often in restored or preserved prints, SFSFF has long supported film preservation through the Silent Film Festival Preservation Fund. In addition, over time, we have expanded our participation in major film restoration projects, premiering four features and some newly discovered documentary footage at this event alone.

This year coincides with a milestone birthday of film scholar extraordinaire Kevin Brownlow, whom we celebrate with an onstage appearance on June 2.

The festival's longtime booster and true friend Frank Buxton (1930–2018) helped make SFSFF the world-class festival it is today, and we dedicate this year's event to his memory.

Enjoy the festival!



WEDNESDAY MAY 30

7:00 PM THE MAN WHO LAUGHS

Musical accompaniment by the Berklee Silent Film Orchestra  
Introduced by Mike Daruty

THURSDAY MAY 31

10:00 AM AMAZING TALES FROM THE ARCHIVES

Guest Presenters: Martin Koerber, Cynthia Walk, Davide Pozzi, Elzbieta Wysocka, Robert Byrne, and Russell Merritt  
Musical accompaniment by Donald Sosin

1:00 PM SOFT SHOES

With short: DETAINED  
Musical accompaniment by Donald Sosin  
Introduced by Jeff Lambert

2:45 PM MASTER OF THE HOUSE

Musical accompaniment by Stephen Horne

5:15 PM AN INN IN TOKYO

Musical accompaniment by Guenter Buchwald and Frank Bockius  
Introduction by Hisashi Okajima

7:15 PM PEOPLE ON SUNDAY

Musical accompaniment by the Mont Alto Motion Picture Orchestra  
Introduction by Martin Koerber

9:15 PM THE LIGHTHOUSE KEEPERS

Musical accompaniment by Guenter Buchwald and Frank Bockius  
Introduction by Hisashi Okajima

FRIDAY JUNE 1

10:00 AM GOOD REFERENCES

Musical accompaniment by Donald Sosin  
Introduction by Bruce Goldstein

12:00 NOON THE OTHER WOMAN'S STORY

Musical accompaniment by Stephen Horne  
Introduction by David Stenn

2:00 PM SILENT AVANT-GARDE

Musical accompaniment by the Matti Bye Ensemble  
Introduction by Craig Baldwin

FRIDAY JUNE 1 continued

4:15 PM ROSITA

Musical accompaniment by the Mont Alto Motion Picture Orchestra  
Introduction by Cari Beauchamp

6:30 PM MOTHER KRAUSE'S JOURNEY TO HAPPINESS

Musical accompaniment by Sascha Jacobsen and the Musical Art Quintet

9:30 PM POLICEMAN

Musical accompaniment by Stephen Horne and Frank Bockius  
Introduction by Eddie Muller

SATURDAY JUNE 2

10:00 AM NO MAN'S GOLD

Musical accompaniment by Donald Sosin and Frank Bockius

12:00 NOON MARE NOSTRUM

Musical accompaniment by Stephen Horne and Frank Bockius  
Selected and introduced by Kevin Brownlow to celebrate his birthday!

2:45 PM TRAPPOLA

With SAN FRANCISCO 1906 footage  
Musical accompaniment by the Mont Alto Motion Picture Orchestra

4:30 PM THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES

Musical accompaniment by the Guenter Buchwald Ensemble  
Introduction by Robert Byrne and Elzbieta Wysocka

7:00 PM THE SAGA OF GÖSTA BERLING

Musical accompaniment by the Matti Bye Ensemble  
SFSFF 2018 Award presentation to Jon Wengström

SUNDAY JUNE 3

10:00 AM SERGE BROMBERG PRESENTS...

Musical accompaniment by Donald Sosin  
Introduced by Serge Bromberg

12:00 NOON A THROW OF DICE

Musical accompaniment by Guenter Buchwald and Frank Bockius

2:15 PM THE ANCIENT LAW

Musical accompaniment by the Donald Sosin Ensemble  
Introduction by Martin Koerber

SUNDAY JUNE 3 continued

5:30 PM FRAGMENT OF AN EMPIRE

Musical accompaniment by Stephen Horne and Frank Bockius

8:00 PM BATTLING BUTLER

Musical accompaniment by the Mont Alto Motion Picture Orchestra  
Introduction by Leonard Maltin

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# MUSICIANS AT THE FESTIVAL

Incubated at the world-renowned Berklee College of Music in Boston, the **BERKLEE SILENT FILM ORCHESTRA** is made up of student composers and musicians, who write original scores for classic silent films and perform them live. BSFO returns to the San Francisco Silent Film Festival for the fourth time, performing on opening night for *The Man Who Laughs*. The 2018 class composers are Phil Carlson, Benjamin Knorr, Marcelle Simpson, Sonia Coronado, Daniel Tauber, Emi Nishida, and Dai Haraguchi. Instrumentalists are Keren Satkin, Andrew van der Paardt, Stephanie Clark, Grant Bingham, Braden Williams, Jeremy Alvarez, Ethan Santos, Eren Başbuğ, Patrick Hanafin, Tania Mesa, Nate Taylor, and Michael Simon. Faculty advisors include Alison Plante, chair of film scoring, Peter Bufano, and Rob Hayes, BSFO's managing director.

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, including the jazz quintet Whisper Hot and the percussion ensemble Timpanicks. He joined Guenter Buchwald's Silent Movie Music Company more than twenty years ago and has since performed for silent films at festivals in Kyoto, Pordenone, and Sodankylä, Finland. He made his first appearance at SFSFF in 2014 and, this year, joins Guenter Buchwald, Stephen Horne, and Donald Sosin to play for various films.

Conductor, composer, pianist, and violinist **GUENTER BUCHWALD** is a pioneer of the renaissance in silent film music. For almost forty years, he has provided live accompaniment for thousands of titles, playing at festivals worldwide from Berlin to Tokyo, both solo and with other musicians through his Silent Movie Music Company. Joined by percussionist Frank Bockius for *An Inn in Tokyo*, *The Lighthouse Keepers*, and *A Throw of Dice*, Buchwald leads the Guenter Buchwald Ensemble for *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. Read an interview with Buchwald on pages 38–39.

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. This year, he performs solo for *Master of the House* and *The Other Woman's Story*, as well as the Garbo Rarities program at the Pacific Film Archive. Frank Bockius joins him for *Policeman*, *Mare Nostrum*, and *Fragment of an Empire*.

Bassist **SASCHA JACOBSEN** draws on a variety of musical styles from classical to jazz and Argentine Tango. In demand as a performer, composer, and arranger he has played with the Kronos Quartet and for many theatrical greats, including Patti LuPone. He is founder of the **MUSICAL ART QUINTET**, which performs his original compositions and includes Matthew Szemela and Michele Walther on violin, Keith Lawrence on viola, and Lewis Patzner on cello. The quintet plays this year for *Mother Krause's Journey to Happiness*. Jacobsen also joins the Donald Sosin Ensemble for *The Ancient Law* and the Guenter Buchwald Ensemble for *The Hound of the Baskervilles*.

**MATTI BYE ENSEMBLE** seeks that magical, emotional alchemy between music and images, playing a wide variety of instruments that includes piano, glockenspiel, violin, musical saw, and other percussion. It is led by award-winning film composer Matti Bye, who has been the Swedish Film Institute's resident silent-movie pianist for almost three decades.

In addition to Bye, the ensemble members include Helena Espvall, Kristian Holmgren, Lotta Johanson, and Laura Naukkarinen. This year, they accompany the Silent Avant-Garde program and *The Saga of Gösta Berling*.

A chamber ensemble that revives the tradition of silent-film orchestras, **MONT ALTO MOTION PICTURE ORCHESTRA** culls historic libraries of music for its live accompaniments. Together Rodney Sauer, Britt Swenson, David Short, Brian Collins, and Dawn Kramer have recorded and toured widely, creating vibrant, emotional, and historically appropriate musical scores for more than 125 films. The orchestra accompanies *People on Sunday*, *Trappola*, *Rosita*, and the closing night film, *Battling Butler*.

Pianist **DONALD SOSIN** has been creating and performing silent film music for forty-five years, playing for major festivals, archives, and DVD recordings. He is the resident accompanist at New York's Film Society of Lincoln Center, the Museum of the Moving Image, and the Brooklyn Academy of Music. His scores are heard regularly on Turner Classic Movies and his music accompanies films on more than fifty DVD releases. He has performed at SFSFF since 2007, and this year plays for the Amazing Tales program, *Soft Shoes*, *Good References*, *No Man's Gold*, and *Serge Bromberg Presents*, as well as leads the Donald Sosin Ensemble for *The Ancient Law*.

**ALICIA SVIGALS** is the world's leading klezmer fiddler and a founder of the Grammy-winning Klezmatics, which she co-led for seventeen years. She has played with and composed for violinist Itzhak Perlman, the Kronos Quartet, playwrights Tony Kushner and Eve Ensler, the late poet Allen Ginsberg, Robert Plant and Jimmy Page of Led Zeppelin, and many others. She has performed on *Late Night with David Letterman*, MTV, PBS's *Great Performances*, NPR's *Prairie Home Companion*, *Weekend Edition*, and *New Sounds*, as well as on the soundtrack for *The L-Word*. In her first SFSFF appearance, she joins the Donald Sosin Ensemble to play for *The Ancient Law*.





# THE MAN WHO LAUGHS

**LIVE MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT BY THE BERKLEE  
SILENT FILM ORCHESTRA**

**DIRECTED BY PAUL LENI, USA, 1928**

**CAST** Conrad Veidt, Mary Philbin, Olga Baclanova, Brandon Hurst, Cesare Gravina, Stuart Holmes, George Siegmann, Josephine Crowell, and Sam De Grasse **PRODUCTION** Universal Pictures Corp. **PRINT SOURCE** Universal Studios

**A**t one point in *King of Jazz*—Universal's all talking! all singing! all dancing! extravaganza of 1930—an unbelievably young Bing Crosby asks the Rhythm Boys "Just what kind of production is this?" "A Super-Super Special-Special Production!" they chime, in unison. The cheeky exchange was an in-joke at the expense of the studio that had already been in the business of "super-productions" well before it left silents reluctantly behind. The pursuit, or at least the promise, of the colossal was a persistent if erratic retrain from early in the history of an outfit whose name and bottom line were associated with penny-pinching programmers.

Industrious German émigré Carl Laemmle owned one Chicago nickelodeon in 1906, and, by 1915, inaugurated Universal City, the largest single movie-making facility in the world. A genial man by mogul standards, Laemmle was also a frugal one. His studio built its success targeting rural markets not dominated by glossier fare (and the glossier studios' monopolizing theater chains). There, audiences were content with the economical westerns, serials, and comedies that were "U's" staple product. He was also hesitant to commit resources to trends like the feature-length (and later "talking") pictures with their greatly increased costs.

Yet bigger movies also meant bigger profits—if also potentially bigger losses—in part because they could access the giant movie palaces of big cities, with their higher ticket prices and more discerning patrons. Laemmle was hardly indifferent to the notion of quality; early on, he reputedly junked a

slew of finished films because he felt they were below the standard he wanted to be associated with. In 1916 he began an earnest pursuit of prestige, releasing films under hierarchical categories, with "Jewels" representing the cream of the crop in terms of marquee stars, production values, promotion, and budgets. Such gambles were "the only way Universal could achieve credibility" against its competitors, according to Universal Studio historian Bernard F. Dick.

These "A" pics weren't all good and certainly weren't all profitable. But they did enhance the studio's reputation, notably when Laemmle took a chance on the Austrian-born Erich von Stroheim, an actor whose first directorial efforts (*Blind Husbands*, *The Devil's Passkey*, *Foolish Wives*) were critical and popular sensations—albeit so extravagant they couldn't quite recoup their costs. No such caveats applied to 1923's "Super Jewel" *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, an enormous undertaking that paid off. Its indelible star Lon Chaney had been a contract player at Universal a few years before, setting an unfortunate precedent for the studio when he left, feeling underappreciated in terms of both salary and roles. (Among many others who similarly slipped through the studio's fingers were Valentino and Bette Davis.) When it mounted *The Phantom of the Opera* as a follow-up two years later, the studio had to beg for the actor's services from Metro, where he had landed. Despite a troubled production, that film proved another lavish smash.

Metro wasn't about to let its "Man of a Thousand Faces" profit a rival yet again, leaving no question



that *The Man Who Laughs*, the follow-up to the Victor Hugo-derived *Hunchback*, would have to be played by someone else. But who? Laemmle, who made annual cross-Atlantic trips back home, found a ready-made creative team from his beloved Germany.

Paul Leni had done superb work as an art director for Lubitsch, E.A. Dupont, Alexander Korda, and Joe May and then caused a stir directing the macabre anthology film *Waxworks* (1924). The international hit featured a fearsome portrayal of Ivan the Terrible by Conrad Veidt, the gaunt giant who'd already chilled viewers in other menacing roles, such as the homicidal somnambulist in *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, in addition to a more sympathetic turn in *The Student of Prague*, one of Germany's biggest hits of 1926.

Signed to Universal, Leni leapt out of the Hollywood gate with *The Cat and the Canary*, a modestly scaled "old dark house" horror-comedy he invested with great style, and which earned great box-office. Lured to the U.S. by John Barrymore, Veidt also made a splash as the suave villain opposite his patron in *Beloved Rogue* (1926). Doll-like Mary Philbin, one of Universal's biggest stars, completed the package—

having already been terrorized by Chaney's *Phantom*, she was a natural addition.

Published in 1869, seven years after *Les Misérables*, Hugo's *The Man Who Laughs* is another epic tale of institutional injustice and social change. In 17th century England, cruel King James II (Sam De Grasse) executes a nobleman for the offense of not kissing his hand—but not before telling the man he's already had his son permanently disfigured, his face surgically frozen into a ghastly grin. (Veidt wore false teeth and other apparatus to achieve the unnerving "Glasgow smile.") Orphaned and impoverished, the boy Gwynplaine ends up a clownish freak at a traveling carnival, where he at least is loved by the blind Dea (Philbin), though he believes his deformity makes him unworthy of her. But when it's discovered he is the rightful heir to an aristocratic fortune, scheming nobles seek him out for their own duplicitous ends.

A tortured Gothic romance rather than a "horror," per se, *The Man Who Laughs* provided welcome challenge to a star who often played dual roles (here he's both father and son) and whose enormous

range was generally better deployed in Europe. Despite the fixed expression of Gwynplaine, Veidt's protagonist is a figure of exquisite pathos. Perhaps his most striking adversary is a duchess who attempts to seduce him out of both covert greed and kinky desire played with daring, blunt sexuality by Olga Baclanova.

Universal spared no expense, spending more than \$1 million and building fifty-plus sets. Leni's German Expressionist wizardry is most evident in the opening

## VEIDT'S PROTAGONIST IS A FIGURE OF EXQUISITE PATHOS.

reels, when the wicked King James court and the boy Gwynplaine's panicked flight are portrayed in vividly grotesque terms. Even as the plot grows more sentimental, his control over camera movement and crowd scenes remains superb.

Planned well before the screen began to talk and completed in 1927, *The Man Who Laughs* was nonetheless held back until the next year while the studio jerry-rigged a soundtrack of canned music, Foley effects, and incidental dialogue to make a kinda-sorta talkie. By the time the film premiered, it seemed hopelessly out of step and was dismissed as overblown hokum. Critics were hostile, branding the story "morbid," finding surprisingly little to praise in either direction or star turn. Audiences were simply absent.

The film was unlucky in many ways. Just a year later, Leni was dead of sepsis at age forty-four, while Philbin (after making a handful of films, including the quasi-horror *Last Performance* with Veidt) abruptly retired and became a recluse. Her costar returned to Germany with the advent of sound. He was insecure about his English but had also generally disliked his roles and the culture in Hollywood. Nonetheless, that's where he wound up—a Jewish third wife combined with outspoken opposition to Hitler forced him to abandon his homeland for good in 1933. Eventually pulled back to California, he enjoyed playing evil Nazis and donating funds to the Allied cause (including a salary higher than Bogart or Bergman's on *Casablanca*) before his own death from a heart attack at only age fifty.

The days of the "House of Laemmle" were also numbered. Carl Sr. soon left the business to better-educated but inexperienced Carl Jr., who pursued expensive quality with a zeal that proved the studio's

undoing. While nearly every studio suffered significant losses during the Great Depression, only Universal got into such straits that it was sold outright in 1936, its founding family ousted whole.

Still the least-known by far of Universal's three silent "horror spectaculars," *The Man Who Laughs* virtually vanished for decades, only resurfacing in the 1970s. Its legacy may be underappreciated, but can hardly be underestimated: Two of Leni's key collaborators, art director Charles D. Hall and makeup wizard Jack P. Pierce, both translated their innovative work in the film to serve 1930s Universal horror classics like *Dracula* and *Frankenstein*, which in turn defined the look of screen horror (and particularly monsters) for decades to come. Anyone seeing Veidt's Gwynplaine for the first time will draw a more obvious connection to an enduring icon of pop culture: His fixed grimace was an admitted inspiration for Batman's arch-nemesis The Joker.

— Dennis Harvey

### BERKLEE SILENT FILM ORCHESTRA

**COMPOSERS** Phil Carlson, Benjamin Knorr, Marcelle Simpson, Sonia Coronado, Daniel Tauber, Emi Nishida, and Dai Haraguchi

**PLAYERS** Keren Satkin (flute), Andrew van der Paardt (oboe), Stephanie Clark (clarinets), Grant Bingham (bassoon), Braden Williams (horn), Jeremy Alvarez (trumpet), Ethan Santos (trombone), Eren Başbuğ (keyboard), Patrick Hanafin (percussion), Tania Mesa (violin), Nate Taylor (cello), and Michael Simon (contrabass)

**FACULTY LEADERS** Alison Plante (chair of film scoring), Assistant Professor Peter Bufano, and Rob Hayes (managing director)



Production still courtesy of Universal Studios





Henri Fescourt's *Les Misérables* (1925)

# SILENT BUT NOT SILENCED

## Outsiders and Outcasts of Silent Cinema

From Chaplin's Tramp to Hart's good-bad man, from Pickford's ragamuffins to Brooks's lost girls, many of silent cinema's most enduring images were of outcasts and outsiders. Whether portrayed with slapstick humor, grim realism, or experimental lyricism, the outcasts of silent film show the medium's power to cultivate empathy as well as a social conscience.

By Nina Fiore

### Hugo's Literary Misfits on Film

In 1911, Albert Capellani's *Hunchback of Notre Dame*, the oldest surviving adaptation of Victor Hugo's novel, condensed the entire plot into thirty-six trim minutes. With dance-like gestures and wide-eyed passion, Stacia Napierkowska deepens the horror of Esmeralda's persecution.

Despite the sanitized plot of 1923's *Hunchback*, Lon Chaney's grotesquely graceful pantomime proved that a visual medium could convey Quasimodo's inner torment as masterfully as Hugo's prose. Universal brought another Hugo outcast lavishly to life in *The Man Who Laughs*. The constraint of using only half his face adds irony and intensity to Conrad Veidt's performance, with his wounded eyes peering over a frozen grin.

In France, Hugo's *Les Misérables* inspired both Capellani and Henri Fescourt, in 1913 and 1925 respectively, to re-create the novel's scope with ambitiously long films. Throughout the silent era, movies reached beyond the lit-

erary masterpieces to explore other misérables, particularly the poor man driven to crime, the orphan, and the fallen woman.

### With a Smile and Perhaps a Tear

Robbed of their childhoods by poverty, Mary Pickford and Charles Chaplin could play hardship for laughs without trivializing pain. During the *The Kid*'s separation scene, Chaplin cuts from Coogan's heartrending panic to an evergreen gag, as one of the Tramp's opponents conks the other on the head. As orphaned Molly in *Sparrows*, Pickford's performance ranges from spunky horseplay to the crushing grief of a woman matured far beyond her years. Molly's humorously garbled Bible verses and her poignant vision of Jesus act as reminders that Christian salvation extends to the orphaned and indigent.

Both the Tramp and Pickford's woman-child arrange their homes as drolly patchwork imitations of bourgeois normalcy. In *The Kid*, Chaplin pokes his head

through a bedsheet hole. Voilà! A dressing gown. In *Tess of the Storm Country*, Pickford tugs a cord with her toe to sweep moth-eaten curtains around her. Fighting the dehumanization of poverty, the Tramp's dandyish panache and the scrappy determination of Pickford's urchins defiantly assert their individuality, charming any viewer into loving them.

### The Fallen Woman (Or Was She Pushed?)

Lois Weber's *Shoes* reveals how the physical and psychological strain of poverty drives a young woman to sell herself. Similarly, in Wu Yonggang's *The Goddess*, starring Ruan Lingyu, a sex worker's only means of supporting her son makes her vulnerable to exploitation. In one startling shot, she sits holding her son on the floor while framed between a gangster's legs, trapped by one man's brutality and a broader social injustice.

Fallen woman pictures can expose cruel double standards. In D.W. Griffith's *Way Down East*, an unwed mother is cast out into a blizzard, but her seducer pays no penalty. Refusing to marry the man who raped her, Thymian in G.W. Pabst's *Diary of a Lost Girl* suffers in a reform school then resorts to prostitution—while the rapist prospers.

Given cinema's tendency to linger on women's faces, these melodramas epitomize a major strength of silent film. As John Fawell notes in *The Hidden Art of Hollywood*,



Louise Brooks in *Diary of a Lost Girl* (1929)

without speech, the audience must study faces to discover what's behind them. The best actresses use the silence to their advantage, drawing us in close but avoiding sensationalism.

### On the Run: Outlaws Real and Imagined

Cinema loves outlaws because they must *move*, covering territory to evade their pursuers. Like Hugo's Jean Valjean, the hero of Victor Sjöström's *The Outlaw and His Wife* stole food out of dire hunger. After escaping prison, he flees to the mountains with his wife. Poetic long shots of their figures dominated by nature convey their estrangement from civilization.

The rugged William S. Hart frequently begins his westerns as a romantic outlaw, riding the open range. As he integrates into society and finds religion in films like *The Return of Draw Egan*, Hart's regeneration parallels the taming of the Wild West.

In *The Goat* and *Cops*, Buster Keaton's honest drifter becomes a wanted man for being at the wrong place at the wrong time. These kinetic two-reelers carry a dark subtext: a merciless law enforcement system may condemn an innocent person.

### The Color of Their Skin

Filed with chaotic, bone-chilling realism, the lynching in Oscar Micheaux's *Within Our Gates* depicts the destruction of black families. Falsely accused of killing a rich white man, Jasper Landry escapes into the swamps with his wife and son, only to be hunted down by an angry mob.

In Kenneth Macpherson's *Borderline*, starring Paul Robeson, Swiss villagers unfairly blame a black couple for the tragic aftermath of an interracial love affair. One mean-faced woman speaks for the racist majority who drive the husband out of town: "If I had my way, not one Negro would be allowed in the country!"

With his adaptation of *Ramona*, Chicasaw director Edwin Carewe creates a forceful indictment of systemic violence against Native Americans. Vicious settlers burn Ramona's village and kill her husband. Her child dies after a white doctor refuses to help. In some of the film's most haunting shots, the grief-maddened, feverish heroine struggles through brambles with blood streaming down her face—a broken woman deprived of home and family by prejudice.

In his preface to *Les Misérables*, Hugo wrote, "So long as ignorance and misery remain on earth, books like this will not be useless." The same can be said of these silent movies.



# AMAZING TALES FROM THE ARCHIVES PRESENTATIONS

LIVE MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT BY DONALD SOSIN

## RESTORATION REDUX

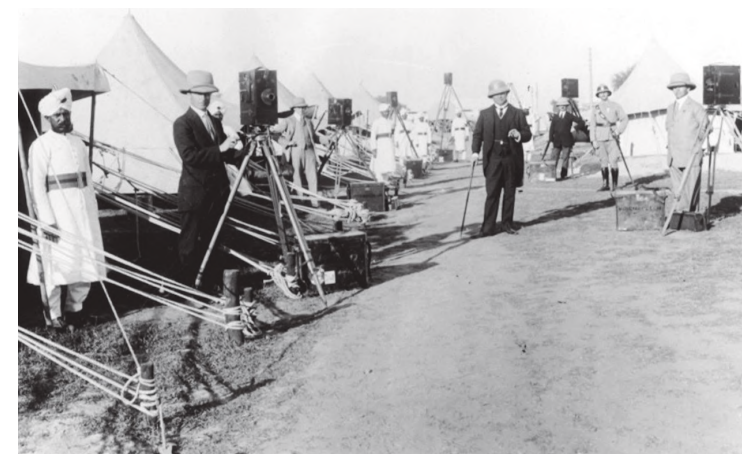
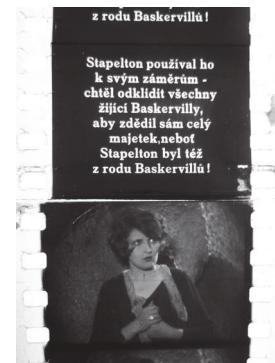
E.A. Dupont's 1923 feature *The Ancient Law*, about the son of a rabbi who leaves the shtetl to become an actor, was reconstructed by the Deutsche Kinemathek in 1984 based on various export copies found in other archives. When Weimar-film scholar **CYNTHIA WALK** pointed out certain imperfections in the restoration, it led to a complete reworking of the film, giving it a totally new appearance, reintroducing the color, and prompting the composition of two new music scores (one of which the Donald Sosin Ensemble performs for the film's screening on Sunday). Professor Walk and **MARTIN KOERBER**, head of the Deutsche Kinemathek film archive, tell the story.

## IN LIVING COLOR

"They are not pictures, but realities," said *Moving Picture World* about the latest demonstration of Kinemacolor films in 1910. The UK-based Natural Colour Kinematograph Company, owned by pioneering producer Charles Urban, made a big splash in the early 1910s, adding a lifelike color palette to actualities, short fiction films, and even some features. After many attempts, state-of-the-art technology has finally allowed for the restoration of Kinemacolor films with their stunningly naturalistic images. **DAVIDE POZZI**, head of L'Immagine Ritrovata film restoration laboratory in Italy, demonstrates how digital tools have helped to recuperate these unique and vivid treasures.

## THE CASE OF THE MISSING HOLMES

Richard Oswald's recently rediscovered *The Hound of the Baskervilles* is a German film featuring an American Sherlock Holmes, a Russian Watson, an Italian Baskerville, and based on a British classic. Its restoration is no less an international project—a print found in Poland with Czech intertitles blended with a French version provided by an Austrian collector. The story of the film's rediscovery, reconstruction, and restoration is a yarn worthy of the great detective himself. UC Berkeley film scholar **RUSSELL MERRITT**, preservationist **ROBERT BYRNE**, and archivist **ELZBIETA WYSOCKA** of Filmoteka Narodowa (Poland's National Film Archive) unravel the intriguing plot.



Clockwise from top right:

Charles Urban and his camera team preparing to film the Delhi Durbar, 1911

A still from *The Ancient Law*, courtesy of Deutsche Kinemathek

Pre-restoration footage from *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, courtesy of Elzbieta Wysocka of Filmoteka Narodowa and Jay Weissberg



# THE STATE OF PRESERVATION

## JON WENGSTRÖM OF THE SWEDISH FILM INSTITUTE

Interview by Marilyn Ferdinand

**H**ome to the masterpieces of Victor Sjöström and Mauritz Stiller, among other treasures of Sweden's Golden Age of silent cinema, the Swedish Film Institute (SFI) has been a vital ally for the San Francisco Silent Film Festival for almost a decade. Recipients of the 2018 San Francisco Silent Film Festival Award, SFI and its curator of archival film collections Jon Wengström have provided at least a film a year since 2011, save one. This year, SFI furnishes a photochemical restoration of Mauritz Stiller's *The Saga of Gösta Berling*, the most complete version to date of Stiller's last Swedish production. In anticipation of his festival appearance, Wengström spoke with me about the state of film preservation in his country, and beyond.

**YOUR RESEARCH INTO THE GOLDEN AGE OF SWEDISH SILENT CINEMA HAS YIELDED SOME EXCITING FILM RECOVERIES. WHICH ONE WAS THE MOST MEANINGFUL FOR YOU?**

Like with *Gösta Berling*, we find parts of films that allow us to restore them to their most complete form. More exciting has been the rediscoveries of films from other periods of production, like some of the earlier works of Victor Sjöström and Mauritz Stiller, and films from the latter half of the 1920s made by less well-known directors. We also spend a lot of time on the preservation of Swedish short and nonfiction films from the silent era. Furthermore, most of the films shown across Europe in the very early years were French. So, we've identified and preserved early films by Pathé, Gaumont, and lesser-known studios, which we consider part of Sweden's film heritage.

**TELL ME ABOUT YOUR WORK RECOVERING MAURITZ STILLER'S FILMS IN COOPERATION WITH OTHER ARCHIVES.**

His films *The Avenger* (*Hämnanaren*, 1915), *Madame de Thèbes* (1915), and *Brother Against Brother* (*Gränsfolken*, 1913), long considered lost, have recently been uncovered. The latter is particularly interesting, as an early work it gives us a better understanding of Stiller's evolution. An almost complete print, tinted and with German intertitles, surfaced in a church in the southwest of Poland where a former priest had a collection. When

foreign distribution prints like this are found, we try to re-create the original Swedish version, including Swedish intertitles with the original font and design. The possibility of doing all this is, of course, dependent on the exchange of elements with the other archives.

**YOU ONCE SAID THAT THE WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY FOR MASS DIGITIZATION PROJECTS IS ALREADY CLOSING. HOW WILL THAT CHANGE THE WORK OF ARCHIVISTS AND RESTORERS?**

I wrote that article in 2013 and was a lot more pessimistic then than I am today. It seemed that the industry was moving away from shooting on film toward shooting new productions with digital cameras. This meant that the industry demand for scanners would wither, as they no longer would need to scan negatives for postproduction or for digital distribution. Archives-only demand would not be enough to sustain the industrial development and production of scanners. Of course, there would always be the possibility for archives to build and develop their own scanners, but they would probably have slower scanning speeds and only a handful of films would be able to receive full-scale digitization during any given period of time. But Hollywood is still making movies shot on film, so scanners are still available. That is good news for archives. Eventually, we will see the end of scanning, but not for a while.

**...I WAS A LOT MORE PESSIMISTIC THEN THAN I AM TODAY.**

**THE RESTORATION OF *GÖSTA BERLING* IS CERTAINLY A CAUSE FOR CELEBRATION. CAN YOU TELL ME HOW THE PIECES OF THAT PUZZLE WERE PUT IN PLACE?**

Our archive has a duplicate positive master copy from the 1950s made off the original negative. The negative had already been shortened, so the existing preservation from the 1970s is 40 minutes shorter than the film's original 223 minutes. Earlier preservations were done in the wrong aspect ratio, only in black and white, and with intertitles using modern fonts. By gathering materials from other archives, we were able to make a new print that restored the original aspect ratio, color, intertitles, and added sixteen more minutes. The new material came from a tinted nitrate print held by the Cinemateca Portuguesa. Cinémathèque Française, Deutsche Kinemathek, and Gosfilmofond in Moscow also provided prints. We used five existing intertitles in our collection as the source for the fonts and the design in restoring the more than four hundred intertitles in the film. We have our own photochemical laboratory north of Stockholm where the work was carried out.

**CAN YOU TELL ME ABOUT THE SCORE BY COMPOSER MATTI BYE AND WHAT HE ADDS TO *GÖSTA BERLING*?**

We like Matti Bye because he doesn't use the film as a backdrop for the score. He is sensitive to the film, bringing force to strong scenes and underplaying the quieter moments. He started doing work for us in the 1990s, and he composed the score for

*Gösta Berling* when the previous restoration was released on DVD in 2007. After the new, longer restoration, Matti expanded his score to incorporate the new information.

**IN RECENT YEARS, SFI HAS FOCUSED ON EQUALITY FOR WOMEN IN FILM PRODUCTION FUNDING. DOES THIS FOCUS ON PARITY HAVE ANY IMPACT ON THE ARCHIVE'S WORK?**

SFI digitally restores up to one hundred films a year, and more than twenty percent of the films were made by female directors, even though the number of female directors of all Swedish films in our collection is just a little over ten percent. So we are actively highlighting films made by women. This female focus is not particularly relevant to the silent era, however, because there weren't many female directors. The most notable one is Karin Swanström, who directed four silent films and later went into production and became head of Svensk Filmindustri in the 1930s. Her 1926 *The Girl in Tails* had been partially preserved in the 1970s, but was only fully restored in 2008. Another of hers is preserved, another lost, and another exists only as a five-minute fragment. We do try to highlight women in other capacities behind the camera, including scriptwriters and designers of intertitles.

***Jon Wengström accepts the San Francisco Silent Film Festival Award in person at the Saturday night screening of The Saga of Gösta Berling.***







# SOFT SHOES

LIVE MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT BY DONALD SOSIN

**DIRECTED BY LLOYD INGRAHAM, USA, 1925**

**CAST** Harry Carey, Lillian Rich, Paul Weigel, and Francis Ford **PRODUCTION** Hunt Stromberg Productions

**PRINT SOURCE** SFSFF Collection

Preceded by Stan Laurel in the newly restored short **DETAINED**

**T**here's an easygoing, friendly manner to actor Harry Carey. His smile, the wrinkle around his eyes, to say nothing of that aura of quiet inner strength, reminds one of John Wayne at his best—only Harry Carey was projecting those qualities from the screen when Wayne was still in high school. Carey made seventy-four feature films during the silent era and more than one hundred shorts, with an additional sixty-three roles, mostly character parts, in talkies through 1948. Today only fifteen of his silent features are known to survive complete, a third of them held in foreign archives. It's a treat to have one of the missing resurface, especially in this beautiful tinted and toned restoration. A surviving nitrate print was found in the earliest stages of decomposition at the Czech Republic's National Film Archive in Prague. Fortunately, the film was saved in time and no trace of deterioration is visible in the restored print.

The sixth film Carey made with independent producer Hunt Stromberg, *Soft Shoes* was a modestly budgeted independent production. Though set in San Francisco, it has only a single stock shot of San Francisco Bay with Los Angeles standing in for the rest of the exteriors. The film was made at a time when the careers of director Lloyd Ingraham and star Carey were in decline. Ingraham, aged fifty at the time of production, had started at Essanay both acting and directing. As director he shepherded Mary Miles Minter's career before William Desmond Taylor inherited the task. By the mid-1920s, however, his directing career was winding down. He made one partial-talkie in 1930 and thereafter found himself

confined to playing dozens of character roles and bits, mostly in low-budget westerns.

New York City-born Harry Carey had had a more significant run. Forty-seven by the time of *Soft Shoes*, his star was beginning to show some tarnish. A restless youth of many talents, Carey had written and starred in a play, *Montana*, which had a terrifically successful three-year national tour. He followed it up with a terrifically unsuccessful play that managed to lose Carey all the money he'd made on the first. He then switched to a film career, appearing alongside Henry B. Walthall, Mary Pickford, Blanche Sweet, and Lillian Gish under D.W. Griffith at Biograph. In 1914 Carey struck out on his own, writing, directing, and starring in two features, a crime drama, *The Master Cracksmen*, and a seafaring tale, *McVeagh of the South Seas*. Two years later found him a rising star in Universal westerns, often playing bad men who are reformed by the influence of a good woman. It was there that he met a young actress named Olive Golden who starred opposite Carey in a series of films. They married in 1920 and the happy union produced two children, one of whom, Harry Carey Jr., later had his own film career. At Universal, Carey also met actor-director Francis Ford and Ford's younger brother Jack, a Hollywood hopeful who had appeared in a dozen or so flicks. Carey convinced the studio to give Jack Ford a chance to direct pictures. Ford biographer Scott Eyman writes: "Carey was crucial in [John] Ford's career. After they were put together grinding out westerns for Carl Laemmle, Carey vouched for the young man and the relationship became familial. For a time, Ford lived with



Carey and his wife Olive. They'd write at night, shoot during the day."

Over time, however, Ford's irascible personality began to fracture their working relationship, though their friendship remained in tact. Ford left Universal for Fox in 1921 and, shortly thereafter, Carey started making films for the British company Robertson-Cole, a step down from Universal. The following year, Carey signed with Hunt Stromberg Productions, where he made *Soft Shoes*. At the age of twenty-two Stromberg had wrangled a job assisting Thomas Ince. Two years later he resigned in order to start his independent production company, quickly making a name for himself with budget productions of quality and distinction. By the time of *Soft Shoes*, Stromberg was on the verge of signing away this independence to become a top-tier executive at newly-formed MGM.

The idea for *Soft Shoes*' lighthearted story came from Carey himself, with Stromberg and prolific silent film scriptwriter Harvey Gates fleshing out the scenario. The cast included up-and-coming British actress Lillian Rich, Carey's old friend Francis Ford, Japanese actor Sojin Kamiyama (whose career lasted through Kurosawa's *Seven Samurai*), and a very persistent pooch not credited by name.

Carey knew dimple-chinned Lillian Rich from Universal where they had appeared together in 1922's *Man to Man* (a lost film). Rich's career had risen steadily but then leveled off in 1923, when she seems to have taken a break, most likely to shed a husband. She picked up again in 1924, playing opposite Jack Hoxie, Hoot Gibson, and Tom Mix in a herd of westerns and in films of general appeal starring Frank Mayo and Reginald Denny. Her career hit a new high when she headlined as the vamp in Cecil B. DeMille's *The Golden Bed*, released a couple weeks after *Soft Shoes* opened.

*Soft Shoes* starts out like a typical western but takes a left turn when Sheriff Pat Halahan (Carey) realizes his gal is really only interested in his money. By the

second reel, the sheriff and his trusty dog Hank are enjoying the sights at a swanky San Francisco cabaret. Hank has discovered a bottle of booze on the floor while Halahan has caught the wayward eye of a woman at the next table, to the annoyance of her husband. After Halahan returns to his room with his now inebriated canine, the otherwise peaceful evening is interrupted by the sound of soft shoes on the fire escape. In comes Faith O'Day (Lillian Rich), a cat burglar armed with pistol and flashlight who demands that Halahan cough up his dough. Halahan takes the threat surprisingly lightly and makes a one-dollar bet that he can return a brooch she stole earlier the same evening before its loss is discovered. Pulling off his boots to slip on his own "soft shoes," Halahan sets off to do a little second-story work, not realizing the trouble he's in for.

Carey's career for the remainder of the silent era was a mix of starring roles in low-budget westerns and third- or fourth-billed supporting roles in A-pictures at MGM, *The Trail of '98* and *Slide, Kelly, Slide*. In 1929 Irving Thalberg approved Carey for the title role in the studio's mammoth *Trader Horn*, shot in Africa. The troubled production was changed to a talkie midway through, and the final film wasn't released until 1931. As the sound era settled in, Carey, now in his mid-fifties, became known for a series of character roles, including his Oscar-nominated performance in *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*.

Carey passed on his tough-but-amiable legacy to another western icon, with whom he also happened to be great friends. According to Scott Eyman: "John Wayne had watched Carey's westerns when he was a kid, and they worked together in *The Shepherd of the Hills*, *Red River* and two others. Wayne loved his natural quality, the way he wore his jeans in early westerns." The year following Carey's death in 1947, production began on John Ford's *3 Godfathers*, a story that Carey had filmed twice, in 1916 and again in 1919 with Ford at the helm. This time the cast included John Wayne and Harry Carey Jr. in his first starring role. Immediately after the main title a lone

horseman rides up against an iridescent desert sunrise as another title fills the screen, "To the Memory of Harry Carey. 'Bright star of the early western sky ....'"

— *Hugh Munro Neely*

## DETAINED

**DIRECTED BY PERCY PEMBROKE**  
**USA, 1924**

**CAST** Stan Laurel, Julie Leonard, and Agnes Ayres  
This Laurel-before-Hardy film has been circulating in versions absent a key gag scene. The missing piece was uncovered only last year by archivist Jurjen Enzing during a digitization project at the Frisian Film Archive in Leeuwarden, Netherlands. One of twelve shorts the British comedian starred in while making films for American producer Joe Rock, it has been restored by Serge Bromberg's Lobster Films in cooperation with the Frisian Film Archive.

**PRINT SOURCE** Lobster Films

## SFSFF RESTORATION

No script or continuity for *Soft Shoes* is known to survive, so the film's restored intertitles are based on a translation of the Czech titles from the only extant version, a 35mm tinted nitrate print held at the Czech Republic's National Film Archive (Národní filmový archiv) in Prague. In several instances the character names were changed for Czech audiences at the time. For instance, Harry Carey's Sheriff Pat Halahan became Pat Harlan in the Czech. For this restoration, these names have been reverted to those of the American release. The color tinting reproduces the color scheme present in the nitrate source print. A partnership between Národní filmový archiv and the San Francisco Silent Film Festival, the project was made possible by a grant from the National Film Preservation Foundation.

— *Robert Byrne*







# MASTER OF THE HOUSE

LIVE MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT BY STEPHEN HORNE

DIRECTED BY CARL TH. DREYER, DENMARK, 1925

CAST Astrid Holm, Johannes Meyer, Karin Nellemose, Mathilde Nielsen, and Clara Schønfeld PRODUCTION Palladium PRINT SOURCE Danish Film Institute

Those in the audience expecting a difficult film by a gloomy Scandinavian director are bound to be disappointed by Carl Th. Dreyer's *Master of the House*. This deft tale of domestic tyranny and subsequent insurgency is characterized by wry humor and bell-like clarity. From its exquisite attention to detail to its neatly symmetrical structure, *Master of the House* (*Du skal ære din Hustru*) unfurls with a thoroughly enjoyable precision. Tom Milne expressed it neatly in 1965 in *Sight and Sound*: "Its golden simplicity almost defies description." As with so many of Dreyer's films, the topic is the subjugation of women, but the weapon of resistance is irony and a series of comic reversals that begins with the sardonic intertitle: "The heroine of this story is called Ida. The 'hero' is called Victor."

Our heroine and not-quite-hero are Ida (Astrid Holm) and Victor (Johannes Meyer), a married couple who live in a small apartment with their three children. Dreyer gave their living arrangements a stiflingly realistic atmosphere by building a replica of a typical inner-city apartment, instead of an open-faced set. Not only were the dimensions exact, but it was supplied with gas and running water and the kitchen drawers stocked. In such a tightly marked space, with characters and other rooms often glimpsed through half-open doors and with the wall clocks frequently in shot, it is always obvious to us where everyone is in the home, and what work needs to be done to keep the household moving.

An early sequence shows Ida and her daughter Karen (Karin Nellemose) busily working their way through the long list of morning chores, from feeding the caged birds to lighting the stove and preparing a

breakfast tray, all the while being careful not to wake the still-sleeping Victor and rouse his anger. He goes out to work but recently had to sell his own business, so money is tight and, when he's indoors, he refuses to lift a finger to help with the housework. Having lost his status in the world of work, he clumsily attempts to reclaim it in the home. It's an unsupportable situation, with Victor playing the domestic despot, and an idle one at that, with no claim to call himself "master of the house," while his wife and children suffer for his comfort.

Enter Mads (Mathilde Nielsen), his former nanny, who is just enough of an outsider to see the injustice for what it is, familiar enough to know when Victor needs to be taught a lesson, and kind enough to recognize that he isn't a brute—it's just that he has some more growing up to do. Which is why she recruits his mother-in-law to assist with the lesson. Like a spoiled boy, Victor is ignorant as well as petulant, so he has plenty to learn from these two mother figures. Ida has not done her part on this score. She has been hiding both her labor and her economizing from him: when he complains that his breakfast is meager, she scrapes butter from her bread onto his, which only convinces Victor that there was enough to go around in the first place. This is where the comic structure kicks in. George Schnéevoigt's deceptively unobtrusive camerawork has calmly tracked the labors and sacrifices of wife and daughter around the house, making us privy to a mass of information that Victor doesn't know. He is about to fall prey to a giant practical joke, and we know what's waiting for him.

The play that *Master of the House* is based on was called *The Tyrant's Fall*. First performed in 1919 in



## "ITS GOLDEN SIMPLICITY ALMOST DEFIES DESCRIPTION."

Copenhagen, it was written by playwright Svend Rindom, who had actually spent a few years working in the cinema, mostly as an actor, and had a future as a prolific screenwriter ahead of him. However, Dreyer, consciously avoiding the trap of "filmed theater," cut the text of the play back with a sharp blade. As he explained to *Cahiers du cinema* in 1965: "In the theatre, you have time to write, time to linger on words and feelings, and the spectator has time to perceive these things. In the cinema it is different. This is why I have always concentrated on the purification of the text, which I compress to the minimum. I did this as early as *Master of the House* ... we compressed it, cleaned it, purified it and the story became very clear, very clean."



Dreyer was working as a journalist before he entered the film business, and his first jobs at the booming Nordisk studio involved editing and writing screenplays as well as the elliptical art of intertitle construction. For him concision was always key; he famously whittled away at the dialogue in his first talkie, *Vampyr* (1932), until it was almost a silent. Although his five sound films are perhaps better known, Dreyer directed nine superb silent films, from 1919's *The President* to his widely acclaimed masterpiece from 1929, *The Passion of Joan of Arc*. At one point considered an outlier in Dreyer's career, as a comedy with no emphasis on faith, *Master of the House* is now rightly acclaimed as one of the strongest of his nine silent films, and it was made right in the middle of his most productive decade.

The cleanliness and purity of *Master of the House's* narrative and visuals have contributed to the rise in its critical fortune. The style of the film has a crisp modernity, to match its timeless subject. Film historian Casper Tybjerg has counted more than eleven hundred edits in this film, far more than in any contemporary Danish film. *Master of the House* also belongs to a German/Scandinavian style called the *Kammerspielfilm*: intimate psychological dramas composed of interior scenes, in which the audience is privileged to enter the private world of an ordinary family. As in Dreyer's previous film, the lavish romantic drama *Michael*, the drama in *Master of the House* arises from the choreography of gazes around a confined space—and the note-perfect performances of the three leads who steadfastly resist the traps of exaggeration or caricature. Delicate-featured, ballet-trained Holm, best known before this role as a Salvation Army martyr in Victor Sjöström's *The Phantom Carriage*, is allowed the film's only touches of pathos, in her daily sacrifices and her eventual nervous collapse. Meyer, a huge star in Denmark, who had already appeared in two Dreyer silents, *Leaves from Satan's Book* (1920) and *Love One Another* (1922), is beautifully brittle as the tyrant about to topple. Early in the film his sneers are enough to turn the audience against him, but it's clearly just a

mask for his real discomfort and his remorse, when it hits, feels authentic. Nellemose made her film debut with *Master of the House*, giving a memorable performance as the daughter caught between parents. It's little surprise given the sensitivity of her portrayal here, but she went on to work on Danish film and television until the early 1980s.

The real star of this film, however is sixty-six-year-old Nielsen, beloved matriarch of the Danish screen, as savior of the household Mads who promises to be hard, but not cruel, while she dishes out some delicious justice on behalf of overworked and underappreciated women everywhere. She may be mischievous but she is also fantastically imperious, directing her final dressing-down of Victor to the men in the audience, too. In the end, all her machinations and lectures are for a good cause: the restoration of domestic harmony, which is the perfect closure to an immaculately designed comedy, summarized neatly by Dreyer's playful final image. In the end it's love, not labor, that makes a happy home.

— Pamela Hutchinson





# AN INN IN TOKYO

**LIVE MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT BY GUENTER BUCHWALD  
AND FRANK BOCKIUS**

**DIRECTED BY YASUJIRO OZU, JAPAN, 1935**

**CAST** Takeshi Sakamoto, Tokkan Kozo, Takayuki Suematsu, Yoshiko Okada, Kazuko Ojima, and Choko Iida

**PRODUCTION** Shochiku Kamata **PRINT SOURCE** Janus Films

**F**or such a professionally modest filmmaker—"I just want to make a tray of good tofu," is the oft-quoted self-assessment—Yasujiro Ozu generates a surprising amount of critical discord. Is he a neorealist or a formalist? Radical or conservative? The most or least Japanese of Japan's filmmakers? Western audiences discovered Ozu's postwar films after the director's death in 1962 and the enthusiasm for melancholy domestic dramas like *Tokyo Story* (1953) often bordered on reverential. Some Western critics saw in Ozu an enigmatic exemplar of the exotic East, like a sort of walking tea ceremony. In Japan where Ozu's films had been making top ten lists since the 1930s, the critical appreciation is just as strong but less awed. In a 1984 soft porn nicknamed *Late Spring: The Sequel* (after Ozu's 1948 film), the director applied Ozu's familiar postwar aesthetic: a low angle, static camera; no dissolves or close-ups; frontal framing of actors during dialogue scenes rather than the classic three-quarter view; shots of empty landscapes as transitions between scenes.

But as Ozu silent films have come to light critics have had a harder time. Film historian Tony Rayns writes, "They discovered that Ozu's tofu recipes were more varied than previously imagined." Critics struggled to square the jazzy gangster dramas and scatological comedies, peppered with Hollywood references, with Ozu's later work. Which is the real Ozu? The mature director who left comedy and gangsters behind to focus on, in historian Donald Richie's words, "The dissolution of the traditional Japanese family"? Or was the true Ozu the energetic, try-anything filmmaker of

the 1920s? *An Inn in Tokyo* is a crucial step in Ozu's evolution to his postwar style. The director combines silent-era melodrama with his postwar formalism, while interjecting almost abstract transition shots between scenes of social realism. Watching the film, we understand the two Ozus were always one.

*An Inn in Tokyo* (*Tokyo no yado*), made in 1934, is the story of a down-and-out laborer looking for work with his two young sons in tow and his encounter with a woman and her daughter in similar circumstances. The Great Depression is on, which in Japan meant skyrocketing unemployment, in addition to the political unrest characterized by what one contemporary journalist called "government by assassination." Kihachi, the father, wanders Tokyo's industrial zone, a barren landscape of giant abandoned spools, water tanks, and endless telephone poles. The elegance of these carefully composed industrial still-lives is a form of understatement; Ozu doesn't beat viewers over the head with the pathos of the family's desperate straits. The film is often compared to *The Bicycle Thief*, and like De Sica's film it acutely observes the grinding details of poverty, the miles trudged in the faint hope of a job, the boredom of empty hours with nothing to eat and no place to go, the eternal struggle to keep up one's spirits.

Ozu used a character named Kihachi in three other films, always played by Takeshi Sakamoto: *Passing Fancy* (1933), *The Story of Floating Weeds* (1934), and *An Innocent Maid* (1935). Throughout his film career Ozu recycled themes, situations, and character names and *Inn* plays like a somber sequel to *Passing Fancy* (it helps that child star Tokkan Kozo plays Ki-



# OZU'S GOAL ... TO MAKE PEOPLE FEEL WITHOUT RESORTING TO DRAMA

hachi's son in both films). Both Kihachis are laborers raising children and both develop an inopportune attachment to women on the margins. The big difference is that the Kihachi of *Passing Fancy* is employed. Lost along with job and shelter in *Inn* are the comic touches and the presence of a community—friends, fellow workers, even passersby—that leaven the earlier film.

Although *Inn* takes place in the big city, Kihachi and his sons might as well be on an abandoned planet, chasing the stray dogs for the bounty that will buy them a meal or the next night's lodging in the cheap boarding house of the title. The two brothers' antics, comic in films like *I Was Born, But...*, here have dire consequences. In one scene the boys fight over who should carry the sack of goods Kihachi has left in their charge and end up leaving the bundle in the middle of the road, each too stubborn to back down. As the brothers face off across a deserted road with the family's only possessions between them, Ozu's low angle makes them monumental, like gunfighters squaring off in a spaghetti western. The director's goal in his films, as he stated late in life, was "to make people feel without resorting to drama." By 1934 he had already achieved it.

One of the most striking elements of *Inn* is Ozu's use of transition shots, a relatively new addition to his stylistic repertoire. At one point the family's dreary wanderings abruptly cut to a gorgeous shot of smoke trailing horizontally across the screen; a woman's profile is followed by a sky bursting with fireworks, a

dazzling quasi-abstract moment. Critic Noël Burch coined the phrase "pillow shots," to describe this device, defining them as superfluous to the narrative. The phrase references a Japanese poetic form, "pillow words," a kind of verbal buffer between ideas. Japanese critic Tadao Sakao, on the other hand, calls these same shots "curtain shots," linking them to Western theatrical tradition. In *Inn* the shots are an echo of the gangster films' razzle-dazzle; the transition shots of the postwar films call much less attention to themselves. They're also a reminder that Ozu's formal techniques, even in the silent era, were in dialogue with the emotional content of his films. Here the shots interrupt the tunnel vision that poverty and homelessness create with a reminder of a wider world.

Ozu wrote *Inn*'s story with frequent collaborators Tadao Ikeda and Maso Arata, using the pseudonym "Winthat Monnet," or "without money." Indeed, according to *An Ozu Retrospective*, a commemorative filmography published in Japan in 1993, Ozu was worried about his financial situation, mentioning it frequently in his diary at the time. The shoot was interrupted by army service and it was a time of upheaval in the director's life in other ways as well: Ozu's father had died the previous year and the Shochiku company, where Ozu had worked since he was nineteen, was planning to move its studio from Kamata to Ofuna, about thirty miles away from the noise of Tokyo's factories. They needed a quieter environment to make talkies.

*Inn* was the director's penultimate silent and Ozu had jokingly vowed to "film the last fade-out of the silent cinema," according to film historian David Bordwell. The studio heads at Shochiku, meanwhile, applied pressure on him to hurry up and direct a sound film. To complicate matters, the director had promised his cameraman, Hideo Mohara, to only use his proprietary recording system, but Shochiku had a contract with Tsuchihashi Sound. Ozu wrote in his diary around the time of making *Inn*, "I made Mohara this long-held promise. If I want to keep this promise,

I may have to quit directing. That would be fine with me too."

In his impulse to toss away his career, critics have suggested Ozu is not unlike his protagonist Kihachi, the father who struggles to accept parental responsibility. Early in his career Ozu had resisted professional advancement: "As an assistant I could drink all I wanted to and spend my time talking," he once recalled. "As a director I'd have had to stay up all night working on continuity." Obstinate in the face of change, he was not only famously reluctant

to adopt sound, he also later avoided color and refused even to consider widescreen ("It reminds me of a roll of toilet paper"). This resistance extended to the thematic and emotional content of his films. In 1933, he addressed himself in his diary, "Kiha-chan! Remember your age. You're old enough to know it's getting harder to play around with 'sophisticated comedy!'" *Inn in Tokyo*'s somber fatalism is a sign the director took his own advice.

— Monica Nolan





# OZU'S COSTUMED CITY

BY CHRIS EDWARDS

YASUJIRO OZU'S TOKYO IS MORE THAN A SETTING. LIKE MANY ACTORS IN HIS FILMS, IT APPEARS AGAIN AND AGAIN, ADOPTING DIFFERENT GUISES, ENRICHING THE STORY ON SCREEN. THIS IS EVIDENT IN HIS OTHER EARLIEST SURVIVING FILMS, AMONG THEM *AN INN IN TOKYO*—PART OF JAPAN'S ENVIABLY LONG SILENT PERIOD.

## TOKYO CHORUS (1931)

"Tokyo ... City of the Unemployed" reads an intertitle early in *Tokyo Chorus*. Ozu's brilliant Depression-era comedy centers on Shinji (Tokihiko Okada): a salaryman with a wife and three young children, and suddenly, no job. He's dealing with rising expenses and declining fortunes, just like the city he lives in.

The Tokyo of *Tokyo Chorus* is moth-eaten and shabby. Its buildings are bleak and its streets are littered with flyers, distributed by men desperate for money; when Shinji visits a restaurant he gets dust on his plate. His office stands in contrast to the crisp, spartan spaces in so many Ozu films: Here the men slouch, eating at their desks; while Shinji

sharpens his pencil by poking it through the grill of an oscillating fan. Even the boss's assistant has a chunk missing from the sole of his shoe. This city's just one more slapstick clown—full of life, but down on its luck.

## A WOMAN OF TOKYO (1933)

Chikako (Yoshiko Okada) supports her brother Ryoichi (Ureo Egawa), a full-time student. He thinks she works evenings assisting a professor; in fact, she works at a nightclub and may be a prostitute. *Woman of Tokyo* is about how lives are destroyed by information like this, whispered in private.

The Tokyo of this film is almost entirely enclosed. Action takes place indoors, in living spaces that are claustrophobic, dimly lit. Within these spaces Chikako's secret is passed from shocked gossip to equally shocked recipient. The night club, on the other hand, is rather well-lit: a space packed with dolled-up women, bottles, and smoke. When we see the outside at all, it is usually dark. Among the few daylight shots is one of a skeletal tree and a pair of thin chimneys—parsimonious, joyless; though Chikako still looks at them with a smile. Only in the closing scene does the film open up, showing us the street where she lives. It is unremarkable. Despite the scandal, this bit of Tokyo could be anywhere.

## DRAGNET GIRL (1933)

The Tokyo of *Dragnet Girl*—to Western eyes, anyway—seems familiar. The characters' trench coats and hats and gats, the dark alleys and cramped hideaways they inhabit, the brawls they get into at parties and pool halls, all recall classic crime films. We see a Western-style boxing club with a poster advertising a Dempsey title fight and another one for *The Champ* (1931).

The couple at the center of the film (played by Kinuyo Tanaka and Joji Oka) dream of getting away. "This will be our last job," they assure one another. "Then we'll go somewhere where nobody knows us." It's the classic dream of the weary crook, but it's also a desire to leave the City—something that isn't so easy to do.

## EARLY SPRING (1956)

Ozu's transition to sound brought new depths to his work, but the City remained prominent. The Tokyo of *Early Spring* (1956) is the clean, bustling center of everything. An early scene shows crowds of young men and women leaving their homes for the commuter trains that will bring them to work. Few of them, we learn, are happy or well-off. Yet to leave Tokyo and its white-collar life is risky. When we meet characters who have done that, they seem uncertain of their choice, even pathetic.

It is telling, then, that *Early Spring* is about infidelity and the toll it takes on a marriage. To pull away from a marriage is perilous, both emotionally and financially—even if one is unhappy. This Tokyo, too, is hard to escape.

## AN AUTUMN AFTERNOON (1962)

Ozu's final film opens with a beautiful shot: a row of white smokestacks, striped with orange, like candy canes. Urban industry, which bore a distant, ominous quality in *An Inn in Tokyo*, seems almost exalted here.

Though the plot of *An Autumn Afternoon* is conservative—concerning a widower, Shuhei (Chishu Ryu), trying to marry off his twenty-something daughter—its Tokyo is bold and bright, transitioning to a new generation. The homes of older people look much as they did in Ozu films from decades before, but the apartment belonging to a younger couple pops with gaudy-colored plastic, like something from a Western magazine ad. Several of the film's most important scenes take place in "Torys Bar"—advertised with a square sign that Ozu places, red and loud, in the foreground.

The citizens of this Tokyo are nearly twenty years removed from the war. But those who fought in it cannot forget, and the City, now garbed in the language and emblems of the West, will not let them. "If we'd won, we'd both be in New York now. And not just a pachinko parlor called New York. The real thing!" moans a younger veteran to Shuhei's older one. "Because we lost, our kids dance around and shake their rumps to American records."

But the City is also wise, and the papering-over of its streetscape with foreign imagery conceals deeper truths. Maybe it's better that Japan lost the war, Shuhei offers. And his friend, suddenly deflated, agrees. At least, he says, "the dumb militarists can't bully us anymore."





# PEOPLE ON SUNDAY

LIVE MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT BY THE MONT ALTO  
MOTION PICTURE ORCHESTRA

**DIRECTED BY ROBERT SIODMAK AND EDGAR G. ULMER, GERMANY, 1929**

**CAST** Erwin Splettstösser, Brigitte Borchert, Wolfgang von Waltershausen, Christl Ehlers, and Annie Schreyer

**PRODUCTION** Filmstudio 1929 **PRINT SOURCE** Deutsche Kinemathek

“I always remind people culture is like a tree,” writer Curt Siodmak told an interviewer in Gerald Koll’s *Weekend am Wannsee* (2000). “It always blooms one last time before it dies.”

“Berlin was like that.”

When Siodmak said this, he was looking back at the city from more than a half-century’s distance. The clip is part of a “making of” documentary about a whimsical film project of Curt’s youth—*People on Sunday*. That film project was made when Curt, who later reinvented the werewolf, was still named “Kurt”; when his brother Robert and a few of their friends (among them Billy, then Billie, Wilder and Edgar G. Ulmer) had the moxie to put together their meager savings, borrow equipment, find a few amateur actors to play themselves, inveigh upon a relative’s financial goodwill, and come out with a freewheeling film excursion that, according to film scholar Noah Isenberg, delighted audiences of its day.

What it does to audiences of our day, however, goes far beyond its original ambitions in the year of its making. Today, *People on Sunday* feels like a precious pair of earrings salvaged from piles of volcanic ash in Pompeii, or a vial of perfume lifted from the RMS *Titanic*—a living artifact whose reflections might tell us something important about precipitous times.

That time was 1929, and the city it depicts, Berlin, was at the end of a wild, world-influencing decade we’ve all heard a lot about: the Weimar era. It produced *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (literature), *The Blue*

*Angel* (Dietrich), Bauhaus (buildings), Brecht (and Weill), Expressionism (of course), and Benjamín (the one and only Walter).

On first glance, *People on Sunday* (*Menschen am Sonntag*) may not look like a product of its day. It has no imposing set design, no breaking of the fourth wall, no saucy cabaret. It pays some attention to architecture, but not the vanguard kind, and critical theory is out while everyday details are in. Cinematically, it feels more like Jean-Luc Godard’s ’60s (*Breathless*) than Fritz Lang’s ’20s (*Metropolis*). But it shares a key force that propelled all the culture coming from its moment. It seizes the day.

The principals’ memories of the production timeline conflict, but codirector Robert Siodmak recalls the film was completed by September. Billy Wilder (credited as scriptwriter) says the production jumped off in July. So—if it was the summer of 1929 when *People on Sunday* was shot—its Berlin was, as Curt Siodmak describes, in a kind of terminal bloom.

Looking back on that moment we know it was fateful—coming as it did on the eve of the Great Depression and the subsequent ascendance of Nazi Party rule. But in its moment, the film took the brash and optimistic vantage points of youth. *People on Sunday* doesn’t show us an impending apocalypse, or hints of disaster (though there does seem to be a military parading in the background of at least one scene). What it projects are chic urbanites in full-fledged flirtation; pouty boyfriends with beerhall manners. It sees paddleboats and tourist snack-shops, portable phonographs and breakable hearts.



It sees stolen kisses and wandering eyes. It is pop—a movie about growing pains and ephemeral feelings. Crises are only momentarily scandalous; subsequent anger is meant to dissipate to serenity as quickly as the clouds overhead.

Necessity (i.e., funding) being the mother of invention, the filmmakers conceive of a form of “factual” fictional cinema that went on to fundamentally change film culture in succeeding decades when it emerged in Italy as neorealism and in France as the New Wave. Like films of those movements, it begins with a simple scenario: two sets of strangers spend a day together.

They are Erwin Splettstösser, who the film tells us “drives taxi 1A 10088” as he reaches over to admit a fare, and Brigitte Borchert, salesperson at a record shop, who “sold 150 copies of ‘In a Little Pastry Shop’ last month” and is seen in front of a display

window. There is Wolfgang von Waltershausen, who gets up to much, including “officer, farmer, used book seller, taxi dancer, and ... travelling wine salesman,” rakishly writing a note while dangling a cigarette from his lips; and Christl Ehlers, who “wears out her shoes as a film extra,” gamely entering a building in hopes of landing a part; as well as (outside the two groups, but attached to the taxi driver) Annie Schreyer, “a fashion model” who’s depicted in anxious recline, filing her nails.

“These five people had never appeared in front of a camera before,” the titles tell us. “Today, they’re all back at their own jobs.”

The “documentary” aspects of *People on Sunday* command our attention, and it is by design, as the titles state: “Film 1929 presents its first experiment, ‘People on Sunday: a film without actors.’” The camerawork is clearly influenced by artful treatments

## THE BITTERSWEET DOCUMENT OF A CULTURAL MOMENT NO ONE REALIZED WAS ENDING SO SOON

of factual material happening in films of its day (city symphonies, themselves influenced by both newsreel and politics abroad) and the film captures scenes of city life and intersecting busy-ness in hectic Dziga Vertov style: the bustling of commuters, the sweeping of trash, the wiping of children’s cheeks, the washing of cars. It then settles on its initial encounter, a woman-man “meet cute” at a train stop, followed by café, where, after a laugh, they come up with an idea: to meet for an outing on Sunday.

The plan is initiated in a way that is not unlike the production itself, which—according to sources gathered and translated for Criterion Collection’s expansive *People on Sunday* booklet—all parties agree began at Berlin’s Romanisches Café with a cast and crew of twenty-somethings. Robert Siodmak claims in his 1980 memoir that all involved abandoned him and cameraman Eugen Schüfftan (the oldest of the bunch, in his thirties), who filmed largely on their own. Non-actress actress Brigitte Borchert confirms that at least in part when she says in the making-of documentary that the script was improvised on a day-to-day basis. Billy Wilder said at the time that they did work from a script, but it was only a handful of pages.

Wilder eloquently stated the aim of the movie they wanted to make in an article of the era for *Tempo*, calling it “a very very simple story, quiet but full of the kinds of melodies that ring in our ears every day. No gags, no elaborate punch lines. Even at the risk of ‘lacking any trace of dramatic law.’”

And so they did. They created a low-budget fact-fiction hybrid mix that, most importantly for its time, thumbed its nose at big-budgeted style and dramatic, scripted Expressionist excess they associated with German studios.

*People on Sunday* was more than just an auspicious start for Wilder, who went on to become Billy, and Hollywood famous, as well as the Siodmaks, cinematography “assistant” (!) Fred Zinnemann, and codirector Ulmer, who later all perforce found their success overseas. Christl Ehlers, too, had to flee Hitler’s Germany for Spain and eventually also settled in the U.S. The horrors that ensued turn this Sunday on its head.

But if the film exists now as a fascinating artifact, a cherished relic rescued from the dust bin, it’s also impossible to miss that *People on Sunday* began as a frolic. It’s incredible entertainment, and it’s also the bittersweet document of a cultural moment no one realized was ending so soon. It gives us one gorgeous weekend, an artful accomplishment, and an urgent warning for today’s portentous times—to take joy where you find it.

— Susan Gerhard







# THE LIGHTHOUSE KEEPERS

LIVE MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT BY GUENTER BUCHWALD  
AND FRANK BOCKIUS

**DIRECTED BY JEAN GRÉMILLON, FRANCE, 1929**

**CAST** Geymond Vital, Genica Athanasiou, Paul Victor Fromet, and Gabrielle Fontan **PRODUCTION** Société des Films du Grand Guignol **PRINT SOURCE** National Film Archive of Japan

Obscure outside of France, the great director Jean Grémillon is a tantalizing figure even for those Americans who discover him, since most of his films remain difficult to see. Those lucky or determined enough to track them down find works of singular grace and sensitivity, with a vision that is often melancholy but always humane.

*The Lighthouse Keepers* (*Gardiens de phare*), his second feature and last silent film, already displays elements that define Grémillon's art. First, despite their lyrical tone and dreamlike atmosphere, his films remain rooted in documentary clarity—truly deserving the label “poetic realism.” Grémillon frequently shot on location and always distilled a potent sense of place. Many of his films, like *The Lighthouse Keepers*, are under the spell of the rugged, storm-swept coast of Brittany, and of the sea itself in its ever-changing, never-changing vastness. His documentary methods also convey a love of work and attention to the detailed processes of physical labor. Here, it is the maintenance of a lighthouse; elsewhere it is the threshing of grain, the mechanics of airplanes or ships or printing presses, the meticulous creation of tapestries or performance of surgery. Music and dance also run through these films, shaping their rhythms and structures, and representing the beating heart of communal life. That harmony is always threatened by private obsessions and conflicts, sometimes by outright madness—forces that break the cyclical patterns of daily life and communities.

Born in 1901 in Bayeux, Normandy (home of the famous medieval tapestries depicting the Norman Conquest in storyboard fashion, a milestone in

the art of visual narrative), Grémillon had Breton ancestry and grew up partly in Brittany, the area he captured on screen with such vivid and visceral feeling. His first love was music, and he defied his parents' disapproval by going to Paris to study violin and composition. In the early 1920s, he played in a pit orchestra at a movie theater, a job that married his musical vocation with his burgeoning interest in cinema. Through a friendship with cinematographer Georges Périnal, who shot many of his early movies, including *The Lighthouse Keepers*, he began working in the film industry, first as a title writer and editor. He got his start directing short documentaries about industrial manufacturing processes then edited footage from these films into an experimental montage called *La Photogénie mécanique* (1924), his first calling card as a filmmaker. (The theory of *photogénie* was expounded by his avant-garde peer Jean Epstein in an effort to pinpoint the quality that makes certain moments in movies mysteriously spark with life.) In 1926, Grémillon went to Brittany to make a documentary about a local fisherman and composed his own elaborately synchronized musical score for what he titled *Un Tour au large*. An irresistibly romantic idiom, *large* means the open sea, as well as breadth, space, even freedom.

*The Lighthouse Keepers* opens with surf breaking in long white lines, a boat sailing out, a woman's hand waving a handkerchief. These images set up a contrast that runs throughout the film between the life of the village, where women in black dresses and curious tall white bonnets wait for the return of their men, and the men's harsh, isolated existence

on a rock-bound lighthouse. Young lovers part in this opening scene, the girl (Genica Athanasiou) staying behind with her mother (Gabrielle Fontan) while the young man, Yvon (Geymond Vital), sets off with his father (Paul Victor Fromet), dreading a month cooped up in the lighthouse that looms up from the sea like a stony and forbidding castle keep. The film's scenario was adapted by director Jacques Feyder from a Grand Guignol play; it takes a bizarre and cruel turn with the revelation that Yvon is nursing a bite from an attack by rabid dog. Stranded by rough seas, he descends into illness and then madness as his father watches in helpless horror.

*The Lighthouse Keepers* is almost a companion piece to Jean Epstein's *Finis terrae*, released the same year and filmed on the Breton islands that became Epstein's favorite cinematic territory. That film concerns two boys spending a summer on a barren island collecting seaweed, and what happens when one of them gets an infected cut and sinks into feverish delirium. The films share many images—the

churning ocean, drifting plumes of smoke from burning kelp, Breton women watching the sea for returning boats—which distill the mingled beauty, loneliness, poetry, and terror of the region known as Finistère, "the edge of the world." Storms, peril, and death at sea are woven into the fabric of daily life in this land where houses are built with the wood of wrecked boats and everyone wears black as though in readiness for mourning. Grémillon captured this underlying sadness and strain again in one of his greatest films, *Remorques* (1941), starring Jean Gabin as the captain of a rescue ship. The director remained drawn to both the obdurate harshness of island life and the otherworldly quality of remote Brittany, in films such as the sinister fairy tale *Pattes blanches* (1949) and the bracingly feminist *L'Amour d'une femme* (1953).

The two directors also shared a fascination with lighthouses—"the eyes of the sea" as Epstein calls them in his poetic documentary *Mor'vran (The Sea of Ravens*, 1931). Grémillon combines the drama of isolation and danger—echoed by films such as Michael Powell's atmospheric quota-quickie *The Phantom Light* (1935) and Roy Boulting's ghostly *Thunder Rock* (1942)—with the cinematic possibilities of the light itself, and the prismatic patterns cast by the revolving, ribbed-glass lens. It is the job of the lighthouse keepers to continually tend and polish this mechanism, and as Yvon's condition deteriorates, the lamp becomes a focal point of his sickness. His growing madness is

## WITH ITS CRYPTIC, ELEMENTAL QUALITY, THE FILM IS A MOOD PIECE RATHER THAN A TRADITIONAL DRAMA.

compounded by grinding routine and claustrophobia; in one scene he paces back and forth like an animal in a cage, watched by his father who seems stricken into passivity. They are trapped in André Barsacq's subtly menacing circular sets, in the relentless, percussive rhythm of shifting shadows and swirling roundels of light.

In Yvon's feverish brain these lights become dizzying psychedelic patterns, framing a dream sequence that devolves from delicate images of a girl on a beach holding a nautilus, and the shadows of hands clasping on rippling sand, to a replay of the dog's attack, the beast multiplied into a kaleidoscopic Cerberus. This nightmare is followed by a lovely but also enigmatic daydream of the father, Bréan, starting with a procession outside a cathedral on a sunny day with the wind whipping the women's skirts and hair ribbons. The villagers dance on the beach, the *farandole* (chain dance) that in Grémillon's films always represents communal festivities. This idyllic vision is shattered by a startling shot of Yvon screaming, his face shot from below filling the screen and his hand blocking part of the camera lens. He gazes down at the waves frothing and seething around the rocks like boiling milk.

With its cryptic, elemental quality, the film is a mood piece rather than a traditional drama, but its strange intensity is gripping. It builds like a long, slow crescendo or a wave gathering force, cresting in a final section that cuts back and forth between the two women sewing by lamplight in their cottage, listening anxiously to a rising storm; a boat floundering in the gale, doomed without the lighthouse's saving beam; and the climactic showdown between father and son, the latter having metamorphosed into a disheveled, terrifying madman.

After *The Lighthouse Keepers*, Grémillon made *La Petite Lise* (1930), a stunning, pitilessly bleak drama that showcases perhaps the most innovative and sophisticated soundscape of any early talkie. Henri Langlois, founder of the Cinémathèque Française, cited it as the film that made him stop regretting the passing of silent movies. But the musicality that helped Grémillon to instinctively understand how sound could be cinematic also shapes his silent films. He uses images like notes, weaves them together like instrumental lines, to paint a vision of life as a perpetual struggle between dissonance and harmony.

— Imogen Sara Smith



Gabrielle Fontan.  
Photo courtesy of Cinémathèque Française



# THE MUSICAL MIND OF *Guenter Buchwald*

Interview by Thomas Gladysz

In 2018, Guenter Buchwald celebrates his fortieth anniversary as a film accompanist. Since 1978, this acclaimed composer, conductor, musical director, and multi-instrumentalist has played for some three thousand films, making him both a pioneer and a veteran. He has performed as a solo artist, as half of a musical duo, and as a member of a trio and a small ensemble at film festivals across Europe as well as Asia and the United States. Buchwald made his first appearance at the San Francisco Silent Film Festival in 2013, where, over the years, he has accompanied films as diverse as *Dragnet Girl*, *The Italian Straw Hat*, and *The Sign of Four*. This year, he plays for another Sherlock Holmes film as well as for films from India, Japan, and France.

**You once mentioned that you try to create an “audible expression” or “acoustic equivalent” for the films you accompany.** What you see on film is either physical or psychological movement. In terms of the physical, if you see a train coming or footprints or steps, you must link the music to that movement. In terms of the psychological, you might see somebody gasp or sigh; then again, you link the music to that sense of movement. When I am watching a person in a film, I give that character an audible expression, or acoustic equivalent. The same thing can be said for a situation in a film. It is an equivalence of what you expect to hear. Sometimes in a film you might only see a character’s face, that they are suffering. That is an inward expression. I try to bring that expression outward. Sometimes what you see is what you hear. Sometimes, it is a translation of what you suppose you hear. Accompanying a film is like the work of someone who translates a text.

**Your repertoire has included everything from classical Baroque to contemporary jazz. How does musical flexibility aid in accompanying a film?** I grew up with all kinds of music. I grew up with classical music, jazz, French chanson, and the Beatles. We only had one radio station, and every-

thing came on it. When I started in music, I was the concertmaster of a classical orchestra, as a violin player. After that, I went to Brittany and was a member of a folk band. Somebody saw me playing and asked me to join a Baroque orchestra. I have friends who are composers, and they have asked me to play their modern compositions. When I played for a silent film for the first time, I thought “I can use everything.” I had accompanied *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. In that film, you might expect to hear medieval church music. I also used a bit of Berlioz, and Bartók, which I was studying at the time. I even used an Irish tune when Esmeralda is dancing.

**Do you think any kind of friction arises when you mix and match different styles?** It helps me to have the choice. It is my job to bring everything into a mood. I have never felt things break apart if I play in a Baroque manner and then five minutes later I play Bartók, because I am not really playing Bartók, but rather in the mood of Bartók.

**The range of films you accompany is similarly varied, from melodrama and slapstick to German Expressionist horror. Has your varied musical background aided you?** Yes. I first started playing for German Expressionist films, like

*Nosferatu*. Though every film has its difficulties and challenges, that film is “easy” to accompany—but it’s also one of those films that changed my approach to musical interpretation, leaving the “surface horror” and going toward an abysmal mirror of lost souls. A variety of musical styles or experiences make it easier to accompany just about any silent film. I do have favorites. I like Northern European films, and Swedish films, especially Victor Sjöström’s films. And Japanese films. I listen to Japanese music before I play for a Japanese silent, which gives me a feeling for a mood. The most difficult for me is slapstick. The musical expectation is a ragtime sound, and it is difficult to break the expectation.

**Generally speaking, how do you approach a film which is new to you?** Since I improvise, it depends on how much time I have to prepare the music, which means knowing the film, knowing the genre, and knowing the film’s ending, all of which serve to give the film a certain mood. Some films might be a Schubert mood, or a Beethoven mood, or a Bartók/Stravinsky mood. I make a choice. I find a musical language, or style. I develop the details, step-by-step. Watching the film ahead of time, I might notice something I wish to call to the attention of the viewer through a musical comment. Before there were screeners and DVDs, I might have had to play for a film the first time I see it. Once, in Switzerland, I was given a film to play only a couple hours ahead of time. I spent that time walking through the town, bringing my musical mind together. If I am composing for a film, it could take me a year or more to bring something together.

**How about a film like *The Lighthouse Keepers*, which Marcel Carné described as “unprecise but not obscure”?** I have known this film a long time. The Carné quote describes the film’s cinematography. It is a contemporary looking film, in a sense. My approach is autobiographical. As I mentioned, I lived for a time in Brittany and was the member of a folk group. This was when I was in my early twenties. Living there, it was moving to simply

watch the tides, and the sea. As a member of a folk group, we played for Brittany dancers. I know the dances of the region. I like to play that kind of music for *The Lighthouse Keepers*. And, I feel close to Grémillon, who loved the sea....



Guenter Buchwald. Photo by Klaus Polkowski



# GOOD REFERENCES

LIVE MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT BY DONALD SOSIN

**DIRECTED BY R. WILLIAM NEILL, USA, 1920**

**CAST** Constance Talmadge, Vincent Coleman, Nellie P. Spaulding, Ned Sparks, and Mona Liza

**PRODUCTION** First National Pictures **PRINT SOURCE** UCLA Film and Television Archive

**G**ood *References*, a 1920 “lost” film recently discovered in a Prague archive and restored by UCLA, is a classic example of the type of movie the silent film business learned was a sure-fire way to make money. Directed by R. William Neill, with a scenario by Dorothy Farnum from an E.J. Rath novel, cinematography by Oliver Marsh, and titles by Burns Mantle, *Good References* relies on one solid gold asset: Constance Talmadge, its radiant and utterly delicious star. Although the script lacks the wit and sass of some of her other movies and is missing a full showcase of her comic skills, it nevertheless moves along at a brisk running time, with plenty of twists and turns that amuse and prove that *Good References* knows its job—let Constance Talmadge carry the ball. She was what audiences were paying to see. *Variety* wrote that “Miss Talmadge’s” admirers turned out in large numbers and an “overflowing audience” proved “the drawing powers of the young comedienne.” *Good References* is thus an important film, offering a clear opportunity for modern audiences to observe silent star power. Constance Talmadge drives the movie through sheer personality, reminding us it was stars like her who made Hollywood a legendary world of gods and goddesses.

*Good References* is only one of several films Talmadge made in 1920. Paired with the somewhat lackluster leading actor Vincent Coleman (and supported by the more interesting Ned Sparks), she plays a young woman who, never having held a paying job, has no references and can’t get hired when it becomes necessary. She solves her problem by pretending to be someone else, taking the place of a sick friend who’s just been hired as secretary

for a young man who’s returning home from college “without diploma.” With the typical good cheer found in the era’s lighthearted movies, she figures it’ll all sort out later, and of course it does. Plot shenanigans abound: scandal, misunderstanding, night court and jail, confusion, deception and confession—all boldly mixed up with a grand party, some mothers, Mrs. Vanderbilt, a boxing champion, a Bishop, and, finally, a proposal and The End. Talmadge sparkles along from event to event, shining out of the frame every time she appears.

At the time she made *Good References*, Talmadge was in her first full star emergence. She was born in 1899 (some sources say 1900) and nicknamed “Dutch” because she was a blonde in a family of brunettes. Her life was in many ways the definitive silent-era show business story. Her mother, the formidable Peg Talmadge, had been deserted by her husband who left her penniless with three little girls to support (Norma, Constance, and Natalie). Facing a grim future, Peg cut her daughters no slack, making it clear to them that they’d need to use their looks and brains to make her a good living. She gave them two suggestions on how to do it: marry rich or become movie stars. Probably scared witless by Peg, the stage mother of all stage mothers, both Norma and Constance got busy and, just to be safe, did *both*. They married rich (more than once) and became top-ranked stars. Norma was one of the three or four most successful dramatic actresses of the era, and Constance a vibrant and sophisticated comedienne. (The hapless Natalie accomplished only one of Peg’s ideas, and her family had to maneuver her through it: they married her off to Buster Keaton.)



# CONSTANCE TALMADGE SPARKLES ALONG FROM EVENT TO EVENT.

Peg became satisfied—and rich herself—and later told an interviewer she'd had to spend years “driving those wild horses to trough.”

Constance Talmadge's career happened as a result of Norma's. She accompanied her older sister to work when Norma became a Vitagraph player in 1910. While her sister worked, Constance made friends, clowned around, displayed high spirits and playful charm, and soon captured enough attention to be cast in small parts on a steady basis. She is said to have made as many as twenty-nine movies over the 1914–1915 period, but her official film debut is defined as a featured role she played in 1914's *Buddy's First Call*. As the pert young romantic lead, she's inexperienced, but utterly casual about it and, as a result, charmingly natural and at ease. (She's so nonchalant that it appears as if she just stopped by to visit the set and decided to jump in and help out the cast. This clearly observable quality of carefree confidence became her movie signature.)

Audiences fell in love with Constance Talmadge. By 1916, she was prominent enough for D.W. Griffith to cast her as his “mountain girl” in the epic *Intolerance*, and she became established on her own—separate from Norma—as a full-fledged movie star. Producer Joseph Schenck (husband of Norma) hired Anita Loos to write material specifically adapted to Constance's personality, which, being so different from Norma's, provided no competition. Loos wrote the characters that Constance was born to play: fun-loving, witty women who appeared in contemporary settings, wearing fashionable gowns and romping through some hotsy-totsy (but essentially safe) escapades with titles such as *A Temperamental*

*Wife, A Virtuous Vamp, In Search of a Sinner, The Love Expert, The Perfect Woman*, and so on.

In the silent era, Norma was a bigger star than Constance, but Constance, unlike her sister, developed her own movie persona. Norma worked toward being taken seriously as an actress, playing characters of different types, everything from a rich wife to a poor wife, a pioneer woman, an Asian maiden, an Arab dancing girl, a Native American princess—a sort of Meryl Streep. Constance did the opposite. She pinned down a role she owned and that defined *her* for her public: a female who didn't fear society's disapproval. She would flirt if she wanted to, work if she wanted to, and run away if she wanted to but always have a sense of humor about it.

Offscreen, Constance was not unlike these characters, jaunting off to Europe on vacation and returning triumphantly with her first husband, a handsome Greek tobacco importer whose chief asset was identified by a fan magazine as “expert ballroom dancer.” (Dorothy Gish commented that Constance was “always getting engaged—but never to less than two men at a time.”) Her boyfriends included Irving Berlin, Richard Barthelmess, Jack Pickford, Michael Arlen, and one of her most serious ones, the MGM Wonder Boy Irving Thalberg, who had his own domineering mother, the scary Henrietta, who didn't approve of Constance.

As she aged, her characters sometimes became married women, and she grew more

sophisticated, better dressed, and socially connected on screen, but she never lost that quality of a slightly tomboyish, gee-whiz kind of gal with a will of her own. F. Scott Fitzgerald labeled her “the flapper de luxe,” an iconic 1920s type, but her saucy and confident women out in the world on their own also predate the working heroines of the 1930s. She's somewhat of an earlier version of Carole Lombard—blonde (although looking darker-haired in this film), and possessing both glamour and a slightly screwball personality.

Within five years after *Good References*, Constance Talmadge was rich, famous, adored, and living her life as she wished. She was only twenty-six years old and seemed to have an unlimited movie future. Instead she made only five more films. Sound came

in and she quit cold in 1929, never looking back. She had no regrets. She'd been at the top of the heap, had a barrel of fun, and had done what her mother told her to do: she'd earned her bread. It's a real treat to be able to see one of Constance Talmadge's rescued films, and those who want more of her charismatic personality should look at three of my personal favorites: *Venus of Venice*, *The Duchess of Buffalo*, and *Breakfast at Sunrise*. In the meantime, *Good References* serves Constance Talmadge well.

— Jeanine Basinger



# DOROTHY FARNUM: ADVICE FROM A SCENARIO WRITER

by Monica Nolan

**B**ack in the silent era a woman didn't have to be an actress to get the glamour treatment from the studio's PR department. Witness the press on Dorothy Farnum who wrote the Constance Talmadge vehicle *Good References*. In a *Photoplay* spread on film writers at work, Farnum is the one reclining on a chaise longue, pen in hand, eyes fixed on the horizon. Surely literary-minded teenaged girls around the country pored over this picture, daydreaming of their own glamorous writing careers, while their schoolmates were mimicking Clara Bow's walk or Mary Pickford's curls. Throughout Farnum's days of scenario stardom, her advice for these aspiring scriptwriters made the newspapers and magazines as often as a starlet's beauty secrets. Here are some vintage Farnum tips:

**MOOD MUSIC** Why, pray tell, is there a large cabinet phonograph next to Farnum's longue in that glamorous *Photoplay* photo, and why are several records strewn at her feet? Because (so the caption tells us) "Dorothy Farnum, specialist in romantic dramas, must Throw Herself Into the Mood as much as a chaise longue and a luxurious negligee ... When writing love scenes, Miss Farnum plays 'Kiss Me Again.' And again and again."

**DON'T GET TECHNICAL** Farnum began her career as an actress, appearing in the films *Over Night* (1915) and *The Cub* (1915), before switching to scenarios. Her first breakthrough came in 1919 when producer Harry Rapf hired her on the basis of a scenario she'd written called "Broken Melody." Alas, two weeks later Rapf let her go "because she did not know the difference between a close-up and a fade-out." Later, she advised

amateur scenarists, "Try not to let yourself become involved in too many intricate and unusual camera details." Rapf rehired her for *Beau Brummel* (1924), John Barrymore's expensive Warner Bros. debut.

**LET THEIR MINDS ALONE** *Beau Brummel*, which Farnum adapted from a 19th century play, was her first big success. Barrymore told the *L.A. Times* that Farnum had given him the greatest role in his career and Farnum's reputation as a skillful adapter of popular

literature and drama grew. Perhaps the difficulties of distilling a written opus into an eight-reel film were on her mind when she told an interviewer in 1926, "You must think with your heart and feel with your head. When I write my scenes I try hard to progress not from one thought to another, but from one feeling to another. For the majority of people want to have their hearts excited and their minds let alone when they come into the world of low lights and soft music of a motion-picture theater."

**SAD CAN ALSO SELL** When Farnum turned Vicente Blasco Ibáñez's potboiler *The Torrent* into a vehicle for Greta Garbo in 1926, the press called it "the first picture with an unhappy ending to win a box-office success." Another story credited "Miss Farnum's insistence on keeping to the spirit of the book," suggesting that her resistance to a Hollywood ending "may start a new trend in picture-play writing, for the sensational success of her work has proved that a logical ending does not put crepe on the box office."

**SIMPLICITY IS KEY** By the late 1920s Farnum was at the top of her game, adapting everything from Sinclair Lewis's *Babbitt* to Rafael Sabatini's *Bardelys the Magnificent* and Willa Cather's *A Lost Lady*. *Variety* included her in a group of high-paid women writers and called her "one of the 'ace' scenario writers of the MGM organization." In 1928 she shared the secret of her success with contestants of a *Photoplay* scenario-writing contest: "Work always with the simplest plots and themes," she advised. "Try as hard as you can to eliminate flash-backs and other devices which retard or slow up the movement of your story."

**DO YOUR RESEARCH** According to the *L.A. Times*, Farnum was educated in a convent boarding school where she studied literature and history. She spoke several languages and traveled extensively. She frequented literary circles and was friends with Sinclair Lewis. "Miss Farnum is quite a

savant and before she commences a film gives several months to delving in libraries or making a trip to Europe for correct data. She is a master of French history and literature and also speaks Spanish and German fluently."

**A KODAK BRAIN** In 1929 Farnum was in Spain on a three-month leave of absence from MGM, which led to a stint with Osso Films in France (*Variety* called her "the only American woman executive in the French film world" in 1930), followed by a contract with British Gaumont. She carried her phonograph with her, finding it as crucial to her writing technique ever: "She has been called 'the writer with a kodak brain,'" said the *L.A. Times* in 1924, "a term inspired by the fact that she stores away in her mental archives vivid pictures of what she sees in her wide travels. She always carries a small phonograph with her and when she is ready to write she puts on a particular type of record chosen as carefully as 'emotion doctors' on films sets choose their themes ... Miss Farnum declares that the spell of music sets her thinking, bringing forth the 'kodaked' ideas from their mental storage with a clarity not otherwise possible."

## DON'T EXPECT APPRECIATION

Farnum was in London for her last film, an adaptation of one more popular potboiler, the Scottish historical doorstopper *Lorna Doone*. After this final credit she retired from films and moved with her husband to France. There is no record of why she quit film work, but in 1926 she admitted to a reporter that the Hollywood writer's life was not all glamorous chaise longues and portable phonographs: "Dorothy sighs because the scenario writer is deemed of so little account. Authors, directors, actors receive all the plaudits—even for 'those little touches'—which generally are born in the scenarist's script, she says." Her final literary effort was a biography of Enlightenment-era *femme de lettres* Madame de Charrière, published in London in 1959.



Dorothy Farnum. Photo courtesy of the Margaret Herrick Library of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences





# THE OTHER WOMAN'S STORY

LIVE MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT BY STEPHEN HORNE

DIRECTED BY B.F. STANLEY, USA, 1925

CAST Alice Calhoun, Robert Frazer, Helen Lee Worthing, and Mahlon Hamilton PRODUCTION B.P. Schulberg Productions PRINT SOURCE SFSFF Collection

**A**lmost a century after her brief career and scandalous marriage, Helen Lee Worthing's name means nothing. Yet in our own woke era, she deserves remembrance. Here was a woman persecuted, prosecuted, and pronounced insane because of who she chose to love. *The Other Woman's Story*—her most substantial screen role, unseen on screen since its original 1925 release—could describe its fallen star herself.

Born in Louisville, Kentucky, in 1896, the sole child of Southern Baptists, Worthing's violet eyes, honey-hued hair, patrician profile, and statuesque carriage ensured her entry in a movie magazine's "Fame and Fortune Contest" (the same one that later launched Brooklyn urchin Clara Bow). Contest judges Mary Pickford, Cecil B. DeMille, and James Montgomery Flagg proclaimed Worthing "one of the three most beautiful girls in the U.S." Florenz Ziegfeld snapped her up for his *Follies*.

On nightly display as a non-speaking showgirl, Worthing grew bored and restless; new pals Marion Davies and Frances Howard (soon to be Mrs. Samuel Goldwyn) persuaded her to ornament their films *Janice Meredith* and *The Swan* then to leave Broadway for Hollywood. Over the next three years, she appeared in ten movies, invariably typecast as a non-dimensional siren. "Helen Lee Worthing, of Ziegfeldian fame, is still showing her figure and undies," wisecracked *Variety* of a typical role. Another critic was more sympathetic: "Somehow the very perfection of her beauty seemed to militate against her."

Indifferent to stardom and dismissive of her image—"Beauty is terribly overrated," she told an

interviewer. "Why take it seriously?"—Worthing's deepest desire lay elsewhere. "I wanted to be a respectable married woman," she said later. "It was almost a complex."

Her dream came true in stranger-than-fiction fashion: on April 11, 1927, a stalker broke into Worthing's house and began beating her. Worthing's terrified screams roused a servant, who telephoned for help; within minutes, dashing Dr. Eugene Nelson arrived. "We 'clicked,'" Worthing remembered. "I loved my doctor almost at once."

The prominent physician called on her the next day; ten weeks later, they eloped to Tijuana and afterward settled into a Hollywood mansion. Worthing refused all film offers, content to play devoted doctor's wife.

The anonymous phone calls started soon after. "Do you know he's a nigger?" a voice whispered. "A nigger. Just ask him."

At the time interracial marriages were illegal in California, and miscegenation a shocking social taboo. Confronting her husband, Worthing learned the truth: born in South Carolina with its segregationist Jim Crow laws, Nelson had excelled at two historically black colleges only to be denied opportunities available to any white physician. Given the choice between a life of privilege or discrimination, he had come to California to "pass" as white.

"I think I went temporarily insane when the force of it dawned on me," Worthing recalled later. "And through it all, my husband tried to comfort me and explain that nothing counted except our love." But as



gossip spread through the movie colony, Worthing was snubbed at restaurants and premieres while her husband's medical practice lost patients, leaving the couple with no other choice: "We decided to live our lives for each other and go away." And with that, the Nelsons dropped out of sight.

Two years later the couple quarreled and their story went public: BEAUTY LOVES, WEDS, LEAVES COLORED MAN, the William Randolph Hearst-owned Los Angeles *Examiner* reported in brazenly racist prose. "The amazing revelation that a reigning beauty noted for her exquisite charm had wedded a non-Caucasian who admittedly has African blood in his veins," then cohabited with him "in the very heart of Los Angeles' black belt" (as the Nelsons' neighborhood was known) seemed beyond belief to an aghast white public. *Examiner* readers learned

that the Nelsons had furnished their humble home with contents from their former mansion, and, if they ventured out to travel by car, she sat in the back seat while he posed as a chauffeur. Now separated from "her dusky doctor," the *Examiner* claimed Worthing "was in seclusion, trying to struggle back across the racial barrier."

If so, her "struggle" soon failed: the following day, the Nelsons called a press conference to announce their reconciliation. "I love him with all my heart," Worthing declared. "Love is not a matter of color." Her husband was even more defiant. "We just want to be left alone here in our garden where stupid and intolerant persons are not welcomed," he told astounded reporters.

With their marriage now a nationwide scandal (Worthing's disgraced father committed suicide), the Nelsons found themselves ostracized by both white and black culture, and as their relationship began to unravel, Worthing sensed her husband turning on her. Diagnosing her distrust as a nervous breakdown, Nelson prescribed medicine that left Worthing comatose. (Unbeknownst to her, the State Narcotic Board was investigating him for illegally dispensing drugs.) She also began to suspect their first meeting was a setup, with Nelson arranging a break-in, then bribing her servant to summon him to the scene.

Worthing's worst fears were confirmed when Nelson convinced a neighbor to sign an "Affidavit of Insanity" in L.A. County Superior Court. The dirty little secret of the California mental health system until 1967, an Insanity Complaint could be filed by anyone and result in a Lunacy Division investigation whose

findings would determine involuntary commitment. Those accused were not allowed legal representation.

Unsealed by court order for the first time since 1932, Psychopathic Department records for "Helen Nelson, An Alleged Insane Person" reveal a woman stripped of her civil rights by a patriarchal system intent on judging not her well-being, but life choices. For marrying a man of color, Worthing was deemed "as insane as a person can be" and remanded to a local "rest home." Six weeks later, now on "psychopathic parole," she accepted an annulment in exchange for spousal support. Nelson dodged payments, leaving her destitute.

Over the ensuing decade, Worthing worked as a soda jerk, seamstress, and nurse trainee, always under an alias because of her notoriety. Drinking and drug busts made more headlines—"I drink in desperation," she told a parole officer—with loyal former servants paying her fines. She died of Seconal poisoning on August 25, 1948. One month later the Supreme Court of California struck down the state's anti-interracial marriage law.

— **David Stenn**

**A complete version of this story appeared in the December 2007 issue of *C* magazine.**



## SFSFF RESTORATION

A six-reel feature produced by B.P. Schulberg Productions, *The Other Woman's Story* was released in the United States on November 15, 1925. This restoration is based on two prints of the film stored at the Library of Congress Packard Campus for Audio-Visual Conservation: an incomplete tinted nitrate print in the AFI/Atkinson Collection and a six-reel black-and-white duplicate negative in the AFI/Donald Nichol Collection. The color tinting came from the colors present in the Atkinson nitrate print and were corroborated by a Dutch export print held at EYE Filmmuseum in Amsterdam. A partnership of the Library of Congress and the San Francisco Silent Film Festival, the restoration was only possible through the intellectual, spiritual, and financial support of David Stenn.

— **Robert Byrne**



Left: Helen Lee Worthing. Right: Helen Lee Worthing and Dr. Eugene Nelson. Photos courtesy of David Stenn





# SILENT AVANT-GARDE

## LIVE MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT BY THE MATTI BYE ENSEMBLE

Selections from the touring retrospective *Unseen Cinema: Early American Avant-Garde Film 1894–1941*, a collaborative film preservation and restoration project by Anthology Film Archives, New York; and Deutsches Filmmuseum, Frankfurt am Main; in collaboration with sixty of the world's leading film archives and with generous support provided by Cineric Inc.; Eastman Kodak Company; Filmmakers Showcase; and Film Preservation Associates.

Ah, that ultimate ghetto orphan of cinema history, the avant-garde film, shunned by distributors, unseen by impatient audiences, relegated for decades to boutique screenings or club meetings or late-night reefer party impulse, struggling to make something absolutely forward-looking in a world only interested in the Right Now, and endeavoring to burn down the edifice of cinematic-narcotic storytelling the Industry has labored so hard to construct. It may come as a surprise to some, but avant-garde or experimental or "underground" film has been a busy and fecund secret history of movies, running alongside mainstream cinema at least since the turn of the 20th century and the fin-de-siècle riffs of Georges Méliès and Frederick S. Armitage. It's still there, occupying the occasional urban art-house screen, intoxicating the fringes of the more adventurous festivals, influencing advertising and music videos, and somehow finding its faithful cult of global viewership in one viewing form or another.

The spirit of the avant-garde has always been to flout the common conventions, artistic but also social and sexual; radical bohemians have no use for Hollywood after all, just as they haven't for rules about premarital sex, dope, strictly cisgendered relationships, or churchgoing. (An important but unexplored factor of our fascination with fringe aesthetes is that they always seem to be having more fun than ordinary, job-holding people.) This is undoubtedly part of their allure. The thing is, avant-garde works cannot stay front of guard forever, or indeed for very long, in any of these areas. Time marches on, and so, in time, like many other categories of visual media with a kind of

baked-in ephemerality (Communist propaganda and bygone-era exploitation films, for two), avant-garde movies become something else once their radical, relevant moment in the sun of controversy and hip unorthodoxy fades into the past.

But what? This is where classic cinephilia steps in and lifts the scantily-clad damsel from the cliff-edge: for our tribe, movie history is the movie present, thank you, and the classic silent works of the avant-garde have never quite gone out of style. In fact, today they look like living dreams, maybe antique-y but just as present in our consciousness as physical, beautiful vestiges of yesteryear: helplessly seductive, adorably pretentious, child-like. If they seem naïve, it's because they've already changed the world. In the watching, though, their naïveté scans like history, charming in its pastness but relevant in the essence of its questions. (Before we even go there, there's the fact of the early avant-garde movies as an infinitely ponderable showcase of extinct cultural history, happenstantial as it was. Artists can't afford sets and production infrastructure, so we get the private reality of the 1920s moment as we rarely do in movies outside of newsreels: the homes and neighborhoods of the new century, newly built California bungalows and Lost Generation cafés, tracts of land as yet unsundered to overdevelopment, handmade studio spaces carved out of living rooms and lit to be abstractly empty.)

But what's fascinating, as always with the avant-garde, are the ways in which the filmmakers sought to rescue film from its

industrialized, commercialized formulaic position in our broader cultural brainpan. For each of them, from Man Ray and Marcel Duchamp to Slavko Vorkapich and Maya Deren, cinema had an essential self that needn't have anything necessarily to do with telling stories—and particularly the sort of melodramatic, resolution-burdened, happy-ending stories Hollywood was churning out by the square yard. Storytelling was a borrowing, after all, of theater and fiction; the representational nature of cinematography was an extension of photography. What was cinema itself, and what was cinematic? How would the medium come to grow up and justify itself as a unique and intrinsic art form, independent of the elements in its original genetic makeup? It wasn't an easy question to answer in the '20s, or now—which is why “experimental,” as monikers go, suits these films very well. You look at Duchamp's *Anémic cinéma* (1926) or Jay Leyda's *A Bronx Morning* (1931), and amid the sheer enjoyment radiating from behind the lens you get a clear sense of mad-doctor experimentation going on, a tactile aesthetic gambling, wherein each filmmaker is asking, could a movie be like this? Why not?

Of course the early influences come from abstract painting and Dadaist poetry—as if the avant-gardists had to digest these additional influences before

they could get to the marrow of the matter. Abstract cinema, exemplified by Duchamp's famous one-off, is its own kind of filmgoing challenge; and you could call *Anémic cinéma* the very first movie made up of absolutely nothing. If the films often feel like nursery playthings, winner-less games of tic-tac-toe and doodles brought to temporal life, then that'd be a conclusion the filmmakers would happily accept. (This sensibility embraced dance as an expressive form as well, as in Miklos Bandy and Stella F. Simon's *Hands*, from 1928, in which hands floating in abstracted space act out love, sex, oppression, resistance, in a flurry of activity that suggests a desperate search for Muppets to inhabit.) This aura of innocence did not last. As the idea of abstraction on film grew more precisely cinematic, through the 1950s and beyond, you're faced with the looming presence of arch-abstractor Stan Brakhage, for whom experimental filmmaking was a serious, even mythic, business (and whose movies, up to his death in 2003, are mostly silent).

Other aesthetic avenues required resources, even to the cut-rate extent of the lavishly designed and postproduction-heavy Robert

Florey and Slavko Vorkapich's *The Life and Death of 9413, a Hollywood Extra* (1928), which owes its hyperbolic style to German Expressionism, but completely owns its transgressive storytelling style and caustic view of Hollywood. Vorkapich is a fascinating figure, a Serbian artist who arrived penniless in Hollywood and quickly enough created a new and singular role for himself: as a master montagist, tasked to crafting elaborate time-bending, theme-pounding montages for all kinds of movies, but rarely

## FULL-BLOODED SURREALIST FLAVOR

given credit. You've seen a Vorkapich montage, even if you didn't know it was his; they have a distinctive intensity and full-blooded Surrealist flavor that often ran so counter to the films they were intended for that his original versions were usually trimmed and tamed. Looking at his originals is making contact with a fiery imagination unique to Golden Age Hollywood. If only every avant-gardist, then and now, had his budgets.

The credit for reinvigorating interest in Vorkapich as an artist, indeed as an avant-gardist, belongs to scholar and curator Bruce Posner, one of the country's preeminent authorities on early experimentalism. He's also pushed the boundaries by including Busby Berkeley and early Edison shooter Edwin S. Porter in his scholarship about the history of avant-garde cinema. It's a salient point to make, given how influential even the craziest of these films have been. Once you start thinking of Vorkapich and Berkeley's haywire and very popular roles within the Hollywood system, and how the visual vocabulary of movies was always testing out new territories, you start to wonder if there has been such a vast

difference between the fringe and the mainstream after all. In the 1920s, if you look to the Soviets and the Germans and the French, it seems as though *everyone* was experimenting.

Cinema was, and in some areas still is, an experiment. Which means the early avant-garde films are never obsolete and will not go gentle into the night of bygone eras. As novelist Michael Chabon has said in an essay redefining what it means to be a nostalgist, “The past is another planet; anyone ought to wonder, as we do, at any traces of it that turn up on this one.” That's perhaps what these old movies have become: strange and impish messages from another world, claiming a permanent place in this one.

— Michael Atkinson







## SILENT AVANT-GARDE THE FILMS

### ANÉMIC CINÉMA, 1926 (Danish Film Institute)

The name of the credited director, Rose Sélavy, is a pseudonym for Marcel Duchamp, who first appeared as Sélavy in a 1921 photograph by Man Ray pasted onto a perfume bottle. Duchamp's only finished film, *Anémic cinéma* is a series of hypnotic twirling discs, what the artist later sold as "rotoreliefs," embossed with erotic puns in French. His collaborators were longtime friend Man Ray and future film director Marc Allégret, who made his first film, *Voyage au Congo* (1927), while touring Africa with his lover, the writer André Gide.

**PAS DE DEUX**, 1924 (University of South Carolina Newsfilm Archive) This fun-house mirror on film is part of the *Looney Lens* series shot by Alfred "Al" Brick, a cameraman for Fox News and Fox Movietone from the 1920s through the 1950s. According to film scholar Bruce Posner, "Brick made the only commercial footage of the December 7, 1941, attack on Pearl Harbor ... not presented to the public until one year later. He ended his newsreel career covering Hollywood glamour events."

### SLAVKO VORKAPICH'S MONTAGE SEQUENCES

(Film Preservation Associates) Born in Serbia in 1894, Slavko Vorkapich survived World War I to mingle with the avant-garde in Montparnasse, settling in the United States in 1920. After *Life and Death of 9413, a Hollywood Extra*, he went on to become a sought-after special-effects expert, creating what he called "symphonies of visual movement" for feature films. Screenwriters indicated "vorkapich" in scripts as shorthand for the insertion of such a montage.

**SKYLINE DANCE**, 1928 This minute-long city symphony montage comes from Paramount studio's *Manhattan Cocktail*, a Dorothy Arzner-directed film about two small-town hopefuls trying to make it on Broadway but get caught up in New York's seedy side. **THE MONEY MACHINE**, 1929 The U.S. Mint churns out cash in this fleeting but potent commentary on what makes the world go 'round in the first

*Wolf of Wall Street*. The Rowland V. Lee-directed tale of greed and revenge came out eight months before the stock market crashed. **PROHIBITION**, 1929 Part of Ludwig Berger's *Sins of the Fathers*, about a restaurateur turned bootlegger, this fast-paced, masterfully economical segment depicts the last night Americans could have a legal drink. **THE FURIES**, 1934 Sexual infidelity and its twin, jealous rage, are encapsulated in this spectacular prologue for *Crime Without Passion*, written and directed by Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur (of *Front Page* fame) for their own production company. Vorkapich's scantily clad mythical creatures proved too much for censors, as did other visual indiscretions, and had to be trimmed for release.

**A BRONX MORNING**, 1931 (British Film Institute National Archive) Trained as a fine art photographer, director Jay Leyda also studied filmmaking in Moscow under Sergei Eisenstein and Dziga Vertov. A prodigious scholar who translated Eisenstein's theories into English, Leyda directed only two films, this "borough symphony" being the first. Assisting him was future blacklister Leo Hurwitz, best known for 1940's *Native Land* made with Paul Strand. Leyda also fell under suspicion for his years in the Soviet Union and had difficulty getting academic positions. At the time of his death in 1988, he had been teaching at New York University for fifteen years.

### THE LIFE AND DEATH OF 9413, A HOLLYWOOD EXTRA

1927 (Film Preservation Associates) Shot in Slavko Vorkapich's kitchen with miniatures made out of matchboxes, tin cans, and other household items, this thirteen-minute tale of life on the fringes of the movie industry is edited to the rhythms of Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*. An impressed Joseph Schenck gave it a splashy premiere with live orchestral accompaniment. Director Robert Florey went on to helm fifty-plus Hollywood features, including 1936's *Hollywood Boulevard*, a remake of *9413*. The man assisting at the camera, Gregg Toland, became a multiple award-winning cinematographer, best known today for the deep-focus photography of *Citizen Kane*.

**HANDS: THE LIFE AND LOVES OF THE GENTLER SEX**, 1927 (Cinémathèque Française) While this thirteen-minute "hand ballet," titled *Hände: Das Leben und die Liebe eines zärtlichen Geschlechts* in the original German, has been historically credited to director Miklos Bandy, Stella F. Simon is recognized today as cocreator of this abstract depiction of a love triangle from a female point-of-view. An American photographer who trained alongside Dorothea Lange and Ralph Steiner, Simon learned motion picture photography in Berlin, where she collaborated with Hans Richter (her disembodied head appears in his 1926 *Filmstudie*). In 1929 the *New York Times* wrote of Simon's only film at the helm: "It seeks to employ hands as graceful and plastic units in some sort of cosmic drama that may mean everything or nothing."

### SERGEI EISENSTEIN'S MEXICAN FOOTAGE:

#### DANCE OF THE HEADS and DAY OF THE DEAD, 1930–1932

(Gosfilmofond of Russia) A trip abroad to study the West's sound technology included a stopover in Hollywood for Soviet director Sergei Eisenstein, whose contract with Paramount sadly bore no fruit. It led, however, to an independently produced project about Mexico, and some breathtaking footage. Aided by longtime colleagues cinematographer Eduard Tisse and multi-hyphenate Grigori Aleksandrov, Eisenstein shot some forty hours of footage for what was supposed to be a short political movie. Anxious financiers, led by author Upton Sinclair, pulled the plug on production. When Eisenstein tried to cross back into the United States to work on the edit, border guards denied him reentry because of "lewd" drawings in his possession. Eventually he was able to return to New York but, in the end, a visit by the KGB to his mother in Moscow sent the filmmaker rushing home. He never got to finish his *Que Viva Mexico!* although it has been released over the years in several iterations.

**THE GHOST TRAIN**, 1903 (Paper Print Collection of the Library of Congress) directed by Frederick Armitage, is seen with the Unseen Cinema Cineric logo at the beginning of the program.





# ROSITA

## LIVE MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT BY THE MONT ALTO MOTION PICTURE ORCHESTRA

**DIRECTED BY ERNST LUBITSCH, USA, 1923**

**CAST** Mary Pickford, Holbrook Blinn, Irene Rich, George Walsh, and Snitz Edwards **PRODUCTION** Mary Pickford Company **PRINT SOURCE** Museum of Modern Art

A consummate actress and creative producer preoccupied with her image, thirty-one-year-old Mary Pickford longed to create an important cinematic work of art. Having forged an unparalleled career as "America's Sweetheart," Pickford now sought mature, sophisticated roles that would acknowledge her age while showcasing her acting skills. She had seen Ernst Lubitsch's German-made historical epics *Madame Dubarry* (1919) and *Anna Boleyn* (1920), which fused spectacle with detailed performances and garnered him accolades as one of world cinema's outstanding directors. The small gestures that succinctly captured character, the use of props for exposition, and his wit and sophistication were all part of "the Lubitsch touch." Furthermore, Lubitsch skillfully directed women in strong roles, and Pickford was convinced he could help her transition into the next phase of her screen career.

Despite the anti-German sentiment that lingered after World War I, Pickford arranged for Lubitsch to emigrate to America in 1922 to direct her in an adaptation of Goethe's *Faust*. Early in preproduction, however, Pickford's mother and business partner, Charlotte, objected to Pickford's role as Marguerite, who gives birth to an illegitimate baby and kills it. Such was her mother's influence that Pickford scuttled the project and Pickford and Lubitsch agreed instead to an adaptation of *Don César de Bazan*, a four-act comic opera first staged in 1872 and based on Victor Hugo's 1838 drama *Ruy Blas*.

Production began for what became *Rosita*, on March 5, 1923, at the Pickford-Fairbanks Studios in West Hollywood under the working title *The Street Singer*.

The title character lives in Seville and has a fondness for satirical songs about the King of Spain (Holbrook Blinn). She loves the young nobleman Don Diego (George Walsh, the younger brother of director Raoul Walsh), who saves her from the king's guards. Intrigued by Rosita, the lecherous monarch pursues her as his mistress and condemns his rival to death. The Queen of Spain (Irene Rich) undermines the king's plans and arranges for Rosita and Don Diego to be united.

To ensure top-notch quality, Pickford hired playwright and novelist Edward Knoblock, best-remembered for his play *Kismet*, to write the screen adaptation. She engaged art directors William Cameron Menzies and Sven Gade who gave the film an operatic splendor. Pickford's cinematographer, Charles Rosher, aspired to high art, rejecting the backlighting technique he had himself perfected in favor of delineating actors and objects under the theory of "perspectography."

From the outset, however, the film felt like too much of a compromise to Pickford. She regretted not getting to play the mythic Marguerite, as it might have been the turning point she sought for her career. Abandoning *Faust* also soured her relationship with Lubitsch as the film had the potential of being a masterwork. During production of *Rosita*, Lubitsch further eroded her customary autonomy as star and producer. Playing the sexy Rosita was a departure for Pickford and revealed her shortcomings as an actress. Yet Pickford rankled under Lubitsch's critical eye and disliked his practice of acting out every part. They fought, with the language barrier exacerbating their miscommunications. Additionally,



the famed continental sophistication of Lubitsch's films did not transfer to Lubitsch himself, a short, cigar-chomping man who was quick to throw a tantrum when defied. Eventually, for the good of the picture, Pickford chose to yield to her director.

Despite the challenging production, Pickford hoped the public would accept her in an adult role. When the film premiered September 14, 1923, at New York City's Lyric Theatre, she was vindicated—the reviews were ecstatic. The *New York Times* wrote, "Nothing more delightfully charming than Mary Pickford's *Rosita* has been seen on the screen for some time." *Variety* described the new Pickford, "... different and greater than at any time in her screen career; a Mary Pickford with her hair done up, pretty as a picture and displaying acting ability few thought her capable of ... *Rosita* is going to go down into screen history as the picture that made Mary Pickford a real actress, or at least, revealed her as one." *Photoplay* said, "There is probably no actress today who could portray the gay, graceful coquettish little street singer of Seville who 'vamps' a king as she does. The production is incomparably beautiful." Opinion at the box-office concurred and the film grossed close to a million dollars, making it one of Pickford's most profitable films. Its success is more impressive considering Paramount's *The Spanish Dancer*, based on the same material and starring the vivacious Pola Negri, premiered shortly thereafter.

*Rosita* behind him, Lubitsch also left behind the historical epics that had made him world-famous and began his long, celebrated career directing sophisticated comedies. Pickford, though, failed to complete her own transformation. While the public accepted her in mature roles, ultimately Pickford could not. She retreated to her child-woman character for her next film, 1924's *Dorothy Vernon of Haddon Hall*, which left her dissatisfied. She tried again for a celluloid masterpiece with fledgling Vienna-born director Josef von Sternberg, whom she hired to write and direct *Backwash*. The film would have featured Pickford as a blind girl trying to survive the industrial

hardships of Pittsburgh, alongside two steel workers: her father and her sweetheart Tom, a hulking, muscular, deaf mute. Charlie Chaplin agreed to appear in the film in scenes depicting the Little Tramp's antics on screen at a movie theater, as well as in the blind girl's imagination. Pickford once again discarded the material as inappropriate for her image. (The scenario is familiar to Chaplin fans for it closely mirrors his 1931 masterpiece *City Lights*, in which a deaf mute participates in a prize fight in order to pay for an operation that might restore a blind girl's sight.)

Pickford turned back to sure-fire commercial fare to play the preadolescent lead character in *Little Annie Rooney* (1925). She attempted another art film with *Sparrows* (1926), a harrowing drama of abandoned children with a gothic visual style, and prevailed upon Lubitsch to modify the edit after its premiere. Both Lubitsch and Chaplin deemed *Sparrows* to be her greatest film, but it proved too dark for her audience. Next, she made a charming romantic comedy *My Best Girl* (1927), which remains her most accessible film to modern audiences. Still determined to "grow up" on screen, she cut off her famous ringlets, appearing with a bob cut in her first sound picture, *Coquette*, which earned her an Academy Award—but her career as an actress was effectively over. Fresher faces of the talkies now populated the movies and Pickford focused on her role as producer and founding partner of United Artists.

Over time Pickford grew to dislike *Rosita*, and her opinion unfortunately stuck. According to her 1955 autobiography, *Rosita* was "... the worst picture, bar none, that I ever made." She continued to denounce it as a failure, while simultaneously withholding the film from view. Her distorted memories of the production coupled with the deteriorating film elements damaged the reputation of the film. She preserved only a single reel—reel 4—because it contained a sequence she liked of *Rosita* resisting the king's unwanted advances, using it in a compilation of her film work produced for the Bond-A-Month campaign in 1953. Pickford later instructed the manager of

her film library, Matty Kemp, to allow *Rosita*'s nitrate materials to deteriorate.

Fortunately, the Moscow-based Gosfilmofond held a 35mm nitrate print from the foreign negative and repatriated it to the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in the 1960s. Although a 16mm reference print was made, the Russian intertitles, poor image quality, and the concern of angering Pickford and Matty Kemp made MoMA reluctant to exhibit it, a policy that continued into the 1990s. MoMA's 2017 reconstruction is made from the 35mm nitrate print, with Pickford's reel 4, preserved by the Mary Pickford Foundation,

used as a template to re-create the look of the original English intertitles. While it is still missing an entire reel of approximately ten minutes, *Rosita* displays a fine balance of director Lubitsch's sophisticated comedies and the historical epics he had directed in Germany. Producer Pickford deserves credit, at the very least, for her creative vision in giving Lubitsch his American debut.

— Jeffrey Vance

**Mont Alto Motion Picture Orchestra has adapted and will perform composer Gillian Anderson's score, commissioned by MoMA for *Rosita*.**



George Walsh and Mary Pickford.  
Photo courtesy of Jeffrey Vance

# AMERICAN LEGACY

by Shari Kizirian

Actresses have carried many films to cha-chingdom and the silent era is no exception. Pearl White fell off horses, flew airplanes, and faced fisticuffs in her many serials, rising to be 1916's most popular star. Sisters Norma and Constance Talmadge were voted by American readers of *Moving Picture World* magazine as the first and second most popular movie actresses in 1921. Marie Dressler headlined Keystone Studio's very first feature-length production when the actress was already in her mid-forties (two sequels were also made). She then made a remarkable comeback in the early sound era when exhibitors considered her "more than Garbo, Cagney, or Gable," writes biographer Matthew Kennedy, "the most profitable film star in the world." Dressler was sixty-five years old. And, yes, Garbo and Negri and Bow—the list goes on.

But there's one woman who stands out, not only as a bankable star but also as the builder of an empire so sturdy pieces of it still gird Hollywood's infrastructure. I'm talking of course of America's first sweetheart: Mary Pickford. Even as many of her films go largely unseen today, she left behind a legacy to American cinema that cannot be ignored.

She made her first films in New York City between gigs on the touring theatrical circuit where she had been performing since age eight. She did it with disdain, for the money, to support her mother and two younger

siblings through the stage's offseason. When she found she was good at it—had an innate understanding of how to come across naturally on camera and a knack for negotiating wages and creative control—she dived in full and changed "flickers" forever. She worked with the major producers and directors in the business, starting out at Biograph under D.W. Griffith, with whom she had screaming matches when he insisted she emote more graphically in scenes. (He once went too far, shoving her down on the set.) She made money for Thomas Ince, Carl Laemmle, Cecil B. DeMille, and Adolph Zukor, all of whom, despite any battles over cash or creativity, praised her skill and savvy as an actress and producer.

In her rise to a beloved icon adorned with a crown of golden curls, she also turned herself into an industry powerhouse, a woman in front of the camera with considerably more influence than anyone behind it, choosing scripts, directors, cameramen, writers, costars, set designers, costumers, all major collaborators (try shushing her in a meeting). Fed up that her films suffered because block-booking practices by distributors yoked them to inferior fare, she gathered other disgruntled talent (Douglas Fairbanks, Charles Chaplin, and D.W. Griffith) to form an independent distribution company. "I am convinced that Mary could have risen to the top in United States Steel," Zukor later said of her, "if she had decided to be a Carnegie instead of a movie star."

When the United States entered the Great War in 1917, she went on tour, raising millions in Liberty Bonds. She also used her fame to market cold cream and promotional tie-ins to her new releases (sheet music, puzzles, a doll) and her influence to advance others. She introduced the Gish sisters, with whom she had toured in her early theater days, to Griffith and got her brother and sister in the business. She had a fruitful multi-film collaboration with cinematographer Charles Rosher (Oscar-nominee for several films, including a win for F.W. Murnau's *Sunrise*) and with screenwriter Francis Marion, insisting that Marion be the one to direct 1921's *The Love Light*, another adult role for Pickford on film.

She lured Germany's most commercial director to Hollywood (Ernst Lubitsch) at a time when prejudice, and competition for movie audiences, was fierce. She was not only a driving force behind United Artists, the first major distributor owned and operated by the talent, but also a founding member of the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences, an institution that still forms a vital part of Hollywood's nervous system today. She worked tirelessly for various charities, including the Motion Picture Relief Fund, the beneficiary of her Payroll Pledge Program, which, beginning in 1932, helped to



support those who had worked in the industry in their years of need.

She carried on an affair with a fellow icon (Douglas Fairbanks), scandalizing the early 20th century in the process, inadvertently leaving behind another durable legacy. She and Fairbanks, who became her second husband, dubbed their home in Beverly Hills "Pickfair," the first half of her surname joined with the first half of his, creating both a concrete place and a mythological mountaintop for the cult of celebrity that continues to enthrall us today.

*Expanded from a segment of "Vocal Women of the Silent Era" published in the editorial section of Fandor's website.*





# MOTHER KRAUSE'S JOURNEY TO HAPPINESS

LIVE MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT BY SASCHA JACOBSEN AND THE MUSICAL ART QUINTET

DIRECTED BY PIEL JUTZI, GERMANY, 1929

**CAST** Alexandra Schmitt, Ilse Trautschold, Holmes Zimmermann, Friedrich Gnas, Gerhard Bienert, Vera Sacharowa, and Fee Wachsmuth **PRODUCTION** Prometheus-Film **PRINT SOURCE** Munich Filmmuseum

Tired of the "detective stories, royal dramas, Indian hunts, and Oriental fables" glutting German movie houses in the early 1920s, writer Bela Balázs called to replace them with the "heroic legends" of revolutionary struggle "whose tempestuous movement, monumental visuals, surprising entanglements ... exceed anything that the bourgeois film can show." Willi Münzenberg, the leftist media mogul of his day, had the deep pockets and infrastructure to answer the call.

In 1922, under the aegis of Workers' International Relief (WIR), Münzenberg had effectively used newsreel footage to raise money to aid Russian famine relief. He later injected capital into the Soviet film industry and distributed the resulting films—a hall of fame of Soviet silents, including *Aelita*, *Girl with a Hatbox*, Pudovkin's *Mother*, and Sergei Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin*—in his native Germany. But the world was changing. Germany's largest and most influential movie studio, Ufa, which had an impressive international reach, its own chain of theaters, as well as controlled a massive publicity machine, put Alfred Hugenberg at its helm in 1927. A very right-leaning mogul, Hugenberg was responsible for having, in the words of film scholar Klaus Kreimeier, "considerably eased Adolph Hitler's rise to power." But in the late 1920s defeat for Münzenberg was still not inevitable.

New restrictions limiting the importation of movies without sufficient investment in domestic production meant Münzenberg also had to produce films

in Germany to continue distributing Soviet fare. So he took over the German Communist Party's film production unit, which provided connections to talent and technical expertise, and tapped Mezhrabpom (WIR's Russian counterpart) for actors and directors to help out. Under the banner of the Prometheus film collective, Münzenberg's filmmakers combined the characteristics of its celebrated national cinema—the mobile camera and evocative compositions—with the era's New Objectivity art movement to "show things as they really are," adding an imperative to educate and motivate the masses.

*Mother Krause's Journey to Happiness* (*Mutter Krauses Fahrt ins Glück*) was made during Prometheus's most productive years, during 1927–1930 when film scholar Jan-Christopher Horak says the company released fifteen features. The success of *The Living Corpse* in early 1929 had yielded sufficient box office to fund Prometheus's most expensive production later that year, *Harbor Drift*, a downbeat but revelatory street film depicting Germany's lower classes trapped in a destructive cycle of poverty and corruption. *Mother Krause* depicts a family caught up in this cycle, with the mother of the title struggling to keep food on the table by selling newspapers and taking in lodgers, but, unlike previous Prometheus films, offers a solution to the hardships. On the continuum of style that culminated in the postwar neorealism of the Italians, *Mother Krause* is directed and photographed by Piel Jutzi who had shot newsreels for WIR and worked as camera operator

on other Prometheus features. Just before *Mother Krause*, Jutzi had taken the same dual role on the Münzenberg-produced *Hunger in Waldenberg*, a documentary-style shoot in Silesian coal country.

Set in Berlin's Red Wedding district, so nicknamed for its working-class residents who supported socialist and communist parties, *Mother Krause* was made collectively, counting on the participation of leftist artists who, like the writer Bela Balázs, had been rallying for a film to represent the masses and their struggles. Primarily a painter, Otto Nagel contributed to the script with anecdotes from his time spent with photographer and illustrator Heinrich Zille, whose axiom that an apartment can kill as easily as an axe infuses the film. Famous for hanging around Berlin's poorer quarters à la Lautrec, Zille had crossed into the mainstream with his vivid caricatures of the city's slums and its occupants—a lumpenproletariat revolutionaries usually dismissed as incapable of being roused to action.

*Mother Krause* is true to its Zillian muse catching its characters "unaware" in the opening that introduces the tenement neighborhood, in the leisure scenes at the fairground and lakeside beach, in the increasingly raucous wedding celebration, and around the crowded pub table where son Paul drinks away the family's hard-earned income. Whereas Zille's illustration style was garish and sometimes mocking, *Mother Krause* hews closer to Zille's earlier photographic style, which inclines toward the spare and tender. When Paul lays the coin down to pay for rounds at the pub, we immediately recall his mother gingerly counting them out for the rent. That a coin is used for her final deliverance creates a devastating parallel.

The influence of artist Käthe Kollwitz, whose etchings put women at the center of the narrative, is also strongly felt. *Mother Krause* (Alexandra Schmitt) is the steadfast heart-muscle of the family and the story. Widowed by the war she is now the primary

caretaker and breadwinner, her posture bowed as if in constant economic prayer, the physical minutiae of their survival passing through her small hands, rationing the coffee grounds, allocating the pfennigs earned. Her daughter Erna (a compelling Ilse Trautschold) meanwhile fights off the family's loutish lodger and learns what lows are expected of women to make ends meet. Evident as well are the influences of Soviet cinema, to which Prometheus was so closely linked. The extreme close-ups, the startling angles, the quick-fire montages, and, from the very first, fluent in Eisensteinian metaphor with the camera's initial sweep among Red Wedding stopping to contemplate pet birds in cages. Despite its ideological bona fides, the film displays empathy and humor, along with powerful visuals not easily forgotten.

*Mother Krause's* filmmakers recognized that simply exposing audiences to the terrible conditions of Germany's poor and working classes was not enough, that knowing does not necessarily spur doing. To that end, the film's denouement outlines a path from witnessing to action, from the theater seat to the protest line. The meet-cute between Max the laborer (Friedrich Gnass) and Erna promises no damsel-rescued-from-distress finale but initiates her awareness of her family's situation as part of a larger but solvable problem. When things hit a grim rock-bottom, Erna knows how to channel her hard-earned consciousness. Shot furiously, as if the marchers were trampling the camera, the resulting demonstration scene was trimmed by censors for release.

The year *Mother Krause* came out, Münzenberg urged revolutionary working-class organizations to look up from their printing presses and take note of what was happening around them. In an article in *Film und Volk* in November 1929, he warned of the forces marshaled against them: "When their bourgeois opponents are building film studios, creating distribution agencies, and acquiring movie theaters,

they are doing the same thing as when they founded printing shops, created newspapers ...." If you want a revolution, he was saying, you have to reach the people where they gather. "Film," he continued, "is not a matter of more or less pleasant entertainment. It is a political question of great significance."

Those forces eventually swamped him. Prometheus releases did well in general, according to Horak, but competing with the thousands of movie screens showing slick escapist fare and newsreels that left the working poor out of the story, required more muscle than Münzenberg's small empire could muster. When the Great Depression hit, Prometheus could barely hang on between box-office receipts. The budget for *Mother Krause* had to be cut because of cost overruns on *Harbor Drift*. Any skimping, however, passes masterfully on screen as style.

By 1932, the company could no longer hold out and Prometheus's next planned feature, *Kuhle Wampe, or Who Owns the World?*, from a script by Bertolt Brecht, had to be financed by someone else. When the unthinkable happened and Hitler took over, Prometheus's parent organization WIR "shipped as many of its prints as possible to Moscow for safe-keeping," according to an article in *Cinema Journal*, which further describes Münzenberg's retreat: "The only part of his impressive film apparatus to continue significant work was Mezhrabpom, which turned out several anti-fascist films and served as a sanctuary for leftist filmmakers fleeing Germany." Eventually Münzenberg fled Stalin, too, but the Nazis hadn't forgotten him and hunted him down in the French Alps. The lumpenproletariat was in fact roused, and led onto the battlefields of World War II.

— Shari Kizirian





# WORKERS OF SILENT CINEMA UNITE!

by Fritz Kramer



**W**hile silent cinema has its share of silk-hatted swells, champagne, and cotillions, the working class at the bottom of the income pyramid is by no means neglected. Miner strikes, child labor, workplace safety disasters, unions (pro and con), and even socialism are featured on the silent screen. Cooks, servants, and servers prepare and distribute fine meals they could never afford to eat, workers construct fine homes they would never be allowed to enter—not by the front door anyway—and silent cinema showcases their struggles, with or without a happy ending tacked on.

## THE INDUSTRY ON INDUSTRY

While overtly socialist films were not the norm in the American film industry, there are notable examples. Upton Sinclair, who declared in 1923 that movies were in the hands of capitalists and vile beyond words, was pleased enough with the 1914 movie adaptation of his novel *The Jungle*, which depicts the meat-packing industry in stomach-churning detail, the solution a cooperative commonwealth.

*Dust* (1916) is overtly pro-labor, opening with factory workers symbolically coining their lives into money to support their employer's lavish lifestyle. The film concludes with safety legislation being passed and the evil owner dying in a fire at his own factory. D.W. Griffith solved the problem of industrialist greed by drowning a particularly avaricious specimen in his own product in *A Corner in Wheat* (1909). William S. Hart took a more redemptive approach in his 1921 drama *The Whistle*. Hart plays a factory worker whose son is killed by unshielded equipment, shielding that Hart had begged the wealthy owner to install only that morning. After the owner sees reason, the film ends with an image of the blowing of the workday whistle. Has anything really changed?

## SCRAPING BY

City streets can be a harsh reality for the poor, and many silent films explore the poignant side of poverty, braving rain, sleet, and snow to scrape out an urban living. *Mother Krause's Journey to Happiness* shows an impoverished Berlin, its streets built by the working class for the convenience of automobiles they do not own. The sidewalks are lined with buskers, newspaper sellers, and people sifting through discards of those higher up on the pyramid in hopes of finding something useful: a toy, a camisole ... The title character of *The Little Match Girl* (1902) is not fortunate enough to find even a scrap of food and, true to the Hans Christian Andersen story, freezes to death as she ignites her wares.

Street-vending and immigration often went hand-in-hand in American productions. Universal's *His People* (1925) features Rudolph Schildkraut as an educated man who must support his family in the New World by selling pattern pieces from a pushcart. A decade earlier, *The Italian*, produced by Thomas Ince, shows George Beban as a gondolier turned corner-shoe-shine. In both cases, the new Americans are portrayed as hardworking, sympathetic breadwinners whose lives teeter on the edge of tragedy or fall straight in. On the other side of the Atlantic, productions like the 1910 Swedish film *Emigranten* tried to warn prospective emigrants that the New World was not all it was cracked up to be.

## IN SERVICE

A bit further up the food chain, the saucy maid and the cunning valet show up time and again in silent film, but they were never so charming as when Ernst Lubitsch was directing. *The Oyster Princess* (1919) features a gentleman's personal gentleman who marries his master's intended by proxy but isn't above trying to wheedle his way into the honeymoon suite. *Warning Shadows* (1923) is a darker take with Fritz Rasp's butler helping to tie his employer's wife to a table where she is stabbed to death—or was it all a dream?

While the servants have the advantage in some films, a more realistic look at the imbalance of power between domestic and employer provides the tragic centerpiece of *The Peasants' Lot* (1912). Aleksandra Goncharova plays a country girl forced to take a job as a maid then is raped and paid off by her employer. She returns home to a sympathetic father but the trauma of her experience is not easily forgotten.

## PINK COLLARS

Gloria Swanson, Mary Pickford, Clara Bow ... every Hollywood actress worth her salt—and even a few men, most notably Harold Lloyd in 1923's *Safety Last!*—took a turn behind the notions counter, working the lingerie department or selling dime-store novelties. The setting was often used as an excuse for a romance with the boss or, better, the boss's son, especially if he resembled Antonio Moreno or Buddy Rogers. Finding a job in the first place was sometimes the main challenge for women entering the job market. Constance Talmadge employs subterfuge in *Good References*—borrowing another job seeker's letter of recommendation—and, you guessed it, ends up with a proposal of marriage from her employer.

The growing beauty industry of the silent era saw everyday men and women paying to look ravishing from their heads to the tips of their fingers, and the flirty manicurist was a staple of the movies. As was the case for retail workers, office staff, and social secretaries, marriage was usually the end game for these fashionable toilers. Manicurists marry their rough-diamond suitors in both *Mantrap* (1926) and *Cottage on Dartmoor* (1929) with the former ending in a battle of the sexes (Flappers-1, Trappers-0) and the latter turning into an unintentional advertisement for safety razors.



# POLICEMAN

LIVE MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT BY STEPHEN HORNE  
AND FRANK BOCKIUS

**DIRECTED BY TOMU UCHIDA, JAPAN, 1933**

**CAST** Isamu Kosugi, Eiji Nakano, Taisuke Matsumoto, Shinobu Araki, Shizuko Mori, Tamako Katsura, and Isao Kitaoka **PRODUCTION** Shinko Kinema **PRINT SOURCE** National Film Archive of Japan

**D**uring the course of more than twenty-five years exploring the history and influence of film noir, I've encountered two wonderful and related surprises: First is the realization that the seeds of noir often were sown in places far afield from what's been circumscribed in academic orthodoxy. Which led directly to the second surprise—a keener appreciation for the commonalities and differences of various cultures through the way crime is rendered in their movies. Imagine: empathy across national boundaries—absorbed through violent, guilt-wracked, nihilistic melodrama.

*Policeman* (*Keisatsukan*), directed by Tsunejiro "Tomu" Uchida in 1933, is the filmmaker's only pre-World War II movie that survives intact. Made the same year his friend and colleague Yasujiro Ozu made the equally dark and stylish *Dragnet Girl*, this one-two punch makes it tempting to herald these films as precursors to the American postwar noir movement, suggesting perhaps that Berlin should share some of the proto-noir credit with Tokyo. *Policeman* even features a somber and vengeful leading man on a dangerous quest in the shadowy underworld, a figure practically *de rigueur* in noir. The film's premise—dour cop and suave crook once were neighborhood pals—was a staple of 1930s Warner Bros. gangster dramas (a major influence on Japanese cinema of the era), and it's also featured in noir classics such as 1948's *Cry of the City*. But while there is unmistakable noir DNA in *Policeman*'s themes and mise-en-scène, Uchida's film is truly more a police procedural, prototype of noir-stained policiers such as Jules Dassin's *The Naked City*

(1948) and Akira Kurosawa's *Stray Dog* (1949). Its emphasis on forensic science makes it a forerunner in that regard as well.

The plot is simple enough: Officer Itami encounters old pal Tetsuo at a police roadblock. Although he claims to merely be a man of leisure, Tetsuo seems sinister from the start. The pals later reunite, letting much sake soften the stiffness between them after six years' separation. Tetsuo is vague about his means, which would set off any good cop's alarm. When Itami's beloved mentor is mortally wounded trying to collar a gang of bank robbers, it takes us far less time than it takes Itami to ID the culprit.

Familiar material, to be sure, but there is uniqueness in how Uchida handles it, and it's these elements that make *Policeman* fascinating. Despite the plot's predictability, and the measured way Uchida lets the manhunt unfold (*very Japanese*), there is no precedent in a crime picture (especially of the American variety) for the intimacy shared by these young men—in flashbacks we glimpse Itami and Tetsuo forging a friendship based on poetry and philosophy and their futures' wide-open promise. Even in the present tense, as Itami's suspicion of his friend leads to a prolonged game of cat-and-mouse, there is depth and tension to their bond, something physical, something you would *never* get in a Hollywood movie.

Much of the emotional impact comes from Uchida's intercutting of past and present; far from the ponderous, telegraphed flashbacks of 1930s films, here the past emerges suddenly, elliptically.



# A PROTOTYPE OF NOIR-STAINED POLICIERS

These are memories that Itami, now the loyal lawman, can't allow himself; yet they sneakily flash to mind despite his attempts to bury them. It's brilliant, inspired filmmaking—especially when these shards of memory disrupt scenes of tedious police work, which Uchida is not afraid to render in all its painstaking monotony.

The flashback reveries are Uchida's strategy for humanizing characters who, as written, are barely one-dimensional. The creation of *Policeman* was instigated by Japanese nationalist authorities fostering a popular entertainment specifically to assuage the public's fear over the rise of criminal gangs. Screenwriter Eizo Yamauchi was instructed to label the film's crooks Communists, despite these garden-variety thieves declaring no political ideology. Politically, director Uchida leaned precipitously to the left, so this couldn't have set easily with his conscience. As a result, the film has a roiling split-personality. Itami's turmoil over his affection for Tetsuo is countered by his righteous obligation to maintain societal order, which leads to a call-to-arms sequence in the third act far beyond the Production Code-mandated square-up in any Hollywood movie.

It's that third act, however, where Uchida shows off his skills as both director and editor. Up to then the film has maintained the unhurried, reflective pace common to Japanese films of the period, with Uchida favoring long moving-camera shots, occasional optical effects (at one point he throws a literal drag-net over the city!), and those evocative subliminal flashbacks. For the film's finale, however, he pulls out all the stops, combining starkly dramatic lighting effects with frantic tracking and panning that threatens to soar out of control at any moment. The climactic chase is an impressionistic, breathtaking explosion

of delirious technique. For this sequence alone, Uchida deserves his adopted professional moniker "Tomu," which means "to spit out dreams."

In its calmer passages, the film is carried by its lead actors. As the conscience-wracked cop, Isamu Kosugi creates a brooding character whose commitment to law and order is besieged by doubts—that he may have closed off any possibility of a wider worldview, and that he's more drawn to his charismatic buddy than he's willing to admit. Despite a few overwrought moments (owing to Uchida's direction), Kosugi's grave visage and understated style would have fit in any postwar film noir. As his soul-brother and nemesis, Eiji Nakano is mesmerizing. He makes a thinly conceived character human and compelling: gregarious and mysterious, charming and menacing, sincere and duplicitous. Near the end of the tale, when he slinks from his hideout sporting a blousy topcoat, rakish fedora, and tinted cheaters—he's everything you want in a noir villain.

It's at that point that Itami, undercover in traditional kimono and geta, "accidentally" bumps into Tetsuo. The scene symbolizes—through wardrobe alone—fear of Western culture contaminating Japan's essence. And as is always the case in noir, it's the villain, dangerous and unpredictable, who cuts the more seductive figure, counterbalance to the cop's rigid conformity.

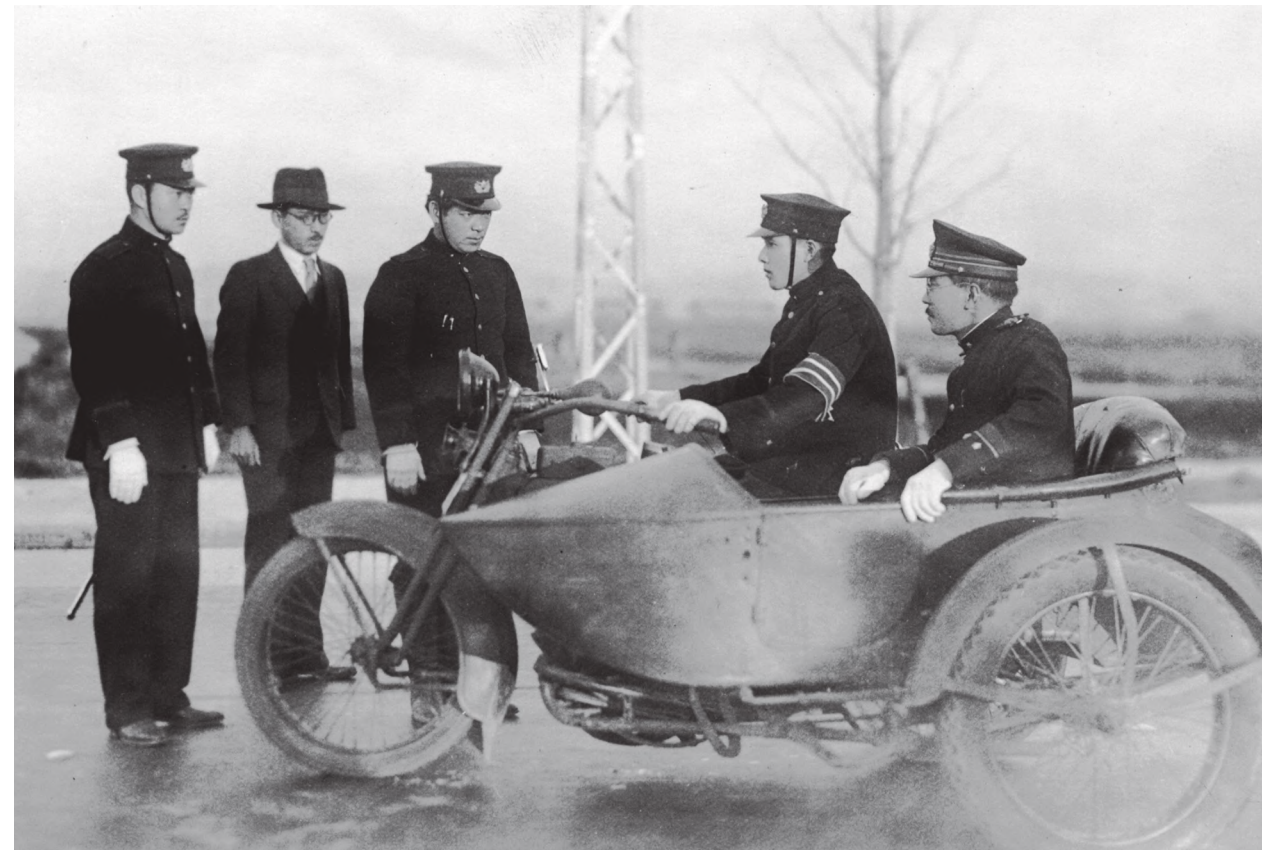
Both actors went on to direct. After learning the craft by playing romantic leads for some of Japan's best directors—Kenji Mizoguchi, Daisuke Ito, Tomotaka Tasaka, and Uchida, among others—Eiji Nakano formed his own production company in 1941, and that year directed his lone feature, *Shogun*. The war cut his ambitions short—he did not return to the screen until 1975, and only then to pay tribute to one

of his mentors in the documentary *Kenji Mizoguchi: The Life of a Filmmaker*. By contrast, Isamu Kosugi's acting career stretched into the 1960s. Starting in 1948, he also became one of Nikkatsu studio's most reliable directors, across all genres, turning in thirty-three features before retiring in 1965.

After witnessing the filmmaking flourishes in *Policeman*, it's distressing to learn that Tomu Uchida's more critically acclaimed films of the 1930s have either vanished or exist only in partial prints: *Jinsei Gekijo* (1936), *Kagirinaki Zenshin* (1937), and *Tsuchi* (1939), a politicized tale of impoverished tenant farmers set in the nation's transitional Meiji era. During the war

Uchida chose to work at the Manchukuo Film Association in Japanese-controlled Inner Manchuria. When Japan lost the war, he remained in China, thinking he could help rebuild the nation's film industry. Instead, he found himself laboring as a coal miner. In a very non-noir twist of fate, Tomu Uchida survived and eventually repatriated to Japan, where in 1954 he resumed his career at Toei studio, making twenty-two more films until his death in 1970.

— Eddie Muller



Isamu Kosugi (center). Photo courtesy of the National Film Archive of Japan





# NO MAN'S GOLD

**LIVE MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT BY DONALD SOSIN  
AND FRANK BOCKIUS**

**DIRECTED BY LEWIS SEILER, USA, 1926**

**CAST** Tom Mix, Eva Novak, Forrest Taylor, Mickey Moore, and Tony the Wonder Horse **PRODUCTION** Fox Film Corp. **PRINT SOURCE** Národní filmový archiv

**T**om Mix, the first true cowboy star, was at the height of his popularity when *No Man's Gold* was released in August 1926. Unlike his major western film predecessors—the genially lunkish “Broncho Billy” Anderson (who seldom rode a horse) or the unsmiling former stage actor William S. Hart (age fifty by the time of his first feature)—Mix went for action, horsemanship, and breathtaking stunts, with little real violence alongside a good measure of comedy. Dramatic structure was never a big concern. As Jeanine Basinger neatly puts it, he’s the Jackie Chan of westerns.

By the mid-1920s, publicists had woven tales about Mix’s heroics as a Rough Rider in Cuba under Teddy Roosevelt (in truth he’d enlisted in 1898 but sat out the Spanish-American War stateside) and as an outlaw-chasing U.S. marshal (he had briefly been a night-shift deputy sheriff in Oklahoma). But Mix was a genuinely daring horseman, a lead rider with the Miller Brothers 101 Ranch and other Wild West shows before taking on every sort of moviemaking odd job for the Selig Polyscope Company across Missouri, Colorado, and Arizona. In 1910 he started playing bit parts in Selig films and by 1914 was given his own California production unit. He directed most, and wrote many, of his 170 or so short films for Selig, which are unpretentious, breezy pleasures. They’re cowboy films made by cowboys. In 1917 he moved up to the Fox studio, where throughout the 1920s he starred in short features running an hour or so that took more interest in narrative without losing their energy and high spirits. His 1924–1926 contract with Fox paid him \$2 million—and he earned it,

turning out, in those three years, twenty-four lively feature-length westerns.

*No Man's Gold* has remained essentially unseen for more than ninety years. The way that the film survived is revealing about Mix’s popularity worldwide. The Fox Film Corporation has the sad distinction of the worst survival record among Hollywood studios of its silent features: fewer than seventeen percent, even including incomplete copies. Mix made seventy-six features for Fox between 1919 and 1928, of which only thirteen survived complete in the United States (along with fragments from three others). But thanks to Mix’s fans around the world, prints were distributed everywhere and at least another seventeen Mix features for Fox have turned up in the most unlikely places. In 1966, the single known print of *No Man's Gold* was unearthed, literally, at a rural chicken farm in what was then Czechoslovakia. A traveling exhibitor had apparently buried it alongside other Tom Mix films, which over the decades became protected, if that’s the word, under a couple feet of chicken guano. Nine other Mix features turn out also to have survived nowhere else than at this Czech farm, from where they were rescued for preservation by Prague’s Národní filmový archiv (National Film Archive). Such were the wandering indignities of film treasures like *No Man's Gold*, and hence the Czech intertitles on the generously loaned print seen here at the festival.

As with almost all Tom Mix films, *No Man's Gold* is set not in the Old West of the frontier and main-street showdowns but in the contemporary West of rodeos and the occasional automobile. Mix himself



outlined the basic plot of almost all his features: "I ride into a place owning my own horse, saddle, and bridle. It isn't my quarrel, but I get into trouble doing the right thing for somebody else. When it's all ironed out, I never get any money reward. I may be made foreman of the ranch and I get the girl, but there is never a fervid love scene." *No Man's Gold* is a light entry in the gold-greed subgenre of contemporary westerns, a predecessor to darker masterworks like *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*; "A Treasure Hunt in the Hills of Peril," as *No Man's Gold's* promotional tagline reads.

The film is based very loosely on the 1920 novel *Dead Man's Gold* by J. Allan Dunn (remembered here for his 1913 guidebook *Care-Free San Francisco*; our city is said to be an "equally excellent workshop and perfect playroom"). Little is retained from the novel but "lust for gold" and the opening plot hook: A dying miner splits the secret of the location of his gold-mine bonanza among three men in an attempt to keep them all honest. "I know what gold does to men," as he puts it in the novel.

Added for the film is the miner's young son who (not to give too much away) will be orphaned within the first two minutes. (Mix films keep their stories moving.) "The small boys on vacation will eat it up," as the *Chicago Tribune* suggested about the film's ideal audience in its condescendingly positive review ("well acted, photographed and directed, and is the kind of a Tom Mix film that Tom Mix fans like"). Playing the orphaned son "Jimmy" is Mickey Moore (1914–2013), who is nearly unrivaled for the longest career in Hollywood (exceeded only by that other Mickey—Mickey Rooney). Moore had started as a two-year-old on Mary Pickford's lap in *The Poor Little Rich Girl* (1917) and became one of the great second-unit action directors working through the year 2000 on films known for their action, including the first three *Indiana Jones* movies.

While *No Man's Gold* lacks any "fervid love scene," it's structured by the orphan's psychic fantasy of

choosing replacement parents, and at the rodeo he introduces "Tom" to "Jane Rogers," played by Eva Novak. In life she would have needed little introduction, having costarred with Mix in nine previous features. (Her older sister Jane Novak had also starred with Mix but was more often the love interest in William S. Hart's westerns.) No passive girlfriend, Eva Novak's "Jane" proves admirably suited for the action film. She wins the rodeo horserace, notwithstanding the outlaws' lame schemes, and will gallop with warning to Tom and Jimmy in the climax. But Mix's true love throughout all his Fox films is Tony—"The Wonder Horse"—who, in *No Man's Gold*, gallantly steps in when Jane's horse is hobbled by the outlaws. Tony took starring roles in two surviving features, *Oh, You Tony!* (1924) and *Just Tony* (1922), where the horse has less generous notions about sharing the screen: "A woman! More trouble!" as an intertitle of his thoughts reads. Tony's hoofprints are alongside Tom's boot-prints in the cement outside Grauman's Chinese Theatre.

Nobody loved canyon locations better or used them more inventively than Tom Mix in his features, including here in *No Man's Gold*. The film doesn't travel as far as *The Great K & A Train Robbery* (1926), with its spectacular use of Colorado's Royal Gorge, or *Sky High* (1922), with its amusingly ludicrous Mexican border story about outlaws smuggling Chinese into the United States via the Grand Canyon until Tom, "Deputy Inspector of Immigration," rides in. *No Man's Gold* appears to stay in California: outside Palm Springs and elsewhere in the Mojave Desert.

True, the outlaws in *No Man's Gold* appear more than typically dimwitted, even for westerns, right from the get-go. (If you're going to steal a gold mine, it may not be the best plan to shoot the only man who knows its location.) Notwithstanding implausibilities, the film builds to a great action finale. *Variety* particularly admired "the never ending series of thrills" in the canyon scenes, concluding when Mix rides down, six-guns blazing, in a cable-suspended mining ore bucket to demolish the outlaws' cabin: "The picture

has a wealth of stunts which grow naturally out of the story instead of being dragged in, working up to a smashing climax." For *Moving Picture World* it was "a crackerjack picture ... with a well-constructed story filled with snap, punch, stunts, comedy, and human interest." *Film Daily* labeled it "a rip-snortin', rarin', tearin' western ... Here is a westerner that has not followed the cut and dried formula."

Next time you're driving west, past Phoenix on the way to Tucson, turn off dull Interstate 10, take the two-lane Highway 79, and pull out at the bronze and granite "Tom Mix Memorial." This is near where Mix died—in 1940 at age sixty—in a single-car auto accident. Tom always liked riding fast.

— Scott Simmon



# Tony the Wonder Horse

by Shari Kizirian

Not for nothing these popular, if often cheaply made, westerns were nicknamed Horse Operas, requiring of actors one paramount skill, ridership, or at least the ability to sit convincingly in the saddle—even better if you could do tricks, which as a veteran of the touring western shows Tom Mix could. But a cowboy's only as impressive as his mount. Mix was still at Selig Polyscope for his first film to cast Tony, 1917's *The Heart of Texas* Ryan, but the sorrel marked with a diamond-shaped blaze and two hind stockings didn't replace Mix's regular steed Old Blue, until the brown gelding broke his leg in 1919 and had to be put down. Bought for six hundred dollars off Pat Chrisman, a frequent extra in Mix's westerns, Tony eventually became just as big of a draw as his rider in the pictures made for the Fox studio.

## Trailin' (1921)

A bridge gives way under Mix and Tony, Courtney E. White writes in *The Historical Animal* about the film's uncut footage, and then both are seen "tipping" into the water below. An unusual role for Mix who trades in his spurs for jodhpurs, *Trailin'* offers an aristocrat's reason to ride, the fox hunt—but in these scenes a stunt double took Tony's place. Maybe it was Black Bess, a large mare (with Tony's markings sometimes painted on) used for long distance shots because she cut a better figure than Tony did from faraway.

## For Big Stakes (1922)

For the trades and audiences alike Tony the Wonder Horse could be the main attraction in Mix films. In its review, *Photoplay* dismissed *For Big Stakes* as "programmer stuff" but saved space for Tony: "His horse got the largest amount of applause—and deserves it more than any other member of the cast. Take the children—they won't be critical and they'll enjoy the horse." It helped that Tony was heavily marketed, in publicity shots (once getting a manicure and a wave for his mane), with tie-ins such as paper dolls, and later a children's book—1934's *Tony and His Pals*, written as if by the horse himself.

## Just Tony (1922)

Tony reportedly got his own fan mail (along with blankets and boxes of sugar cubes), once receiving a letter addressed to "Just Tony, Somewhere in the USA." *Just Tony* is also the first of three films named for the horse actor and *Film Daily* approved of his first time at center stage: "Tony has long been a familiar and important figure in the Tom Mix features, but this time he goes it alone, acquitting himself capable at all times." *Variety* seems to genuinely marvel at the stunts: "How they ever kept a camera near the rough and tumble is hard to figure out." A *Photoplay* columnist disagreed completely but still managed to elevate Tony: "Somebody said of this picture that it was

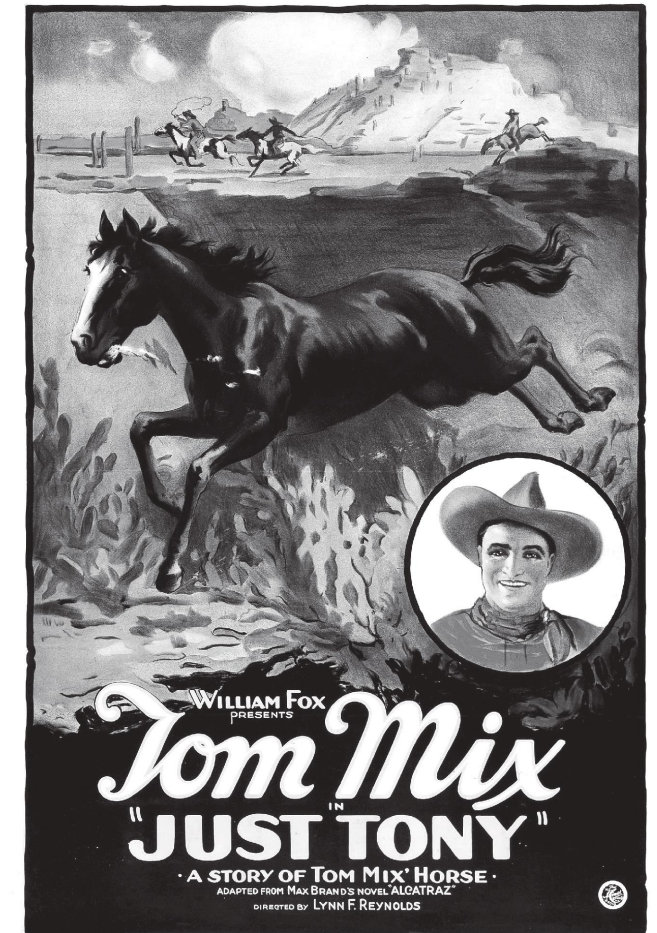
acted by a horse but unfortunately not written by one."

## The Great K & A Train Robbery (1926)

Directed by *No Man's Gold*'s Lewis Seiler and shot on location, this railroad detective story incorporates Colorado's stunningly steep canyons into the action and features Tony holding, as one review states, "a large share of the interest" with some "remarkable stunts, working by himself on quite a few occasions." Fifteen minutes in, before leaping out a hacienda window into the drink then over a fence, all while carrying two riders, Tony is tethered to a caboose, available for Mix to hop on and ride to save another day. It's rather nonchalantly done but seems a particularly reckless thing to ask of a horse.

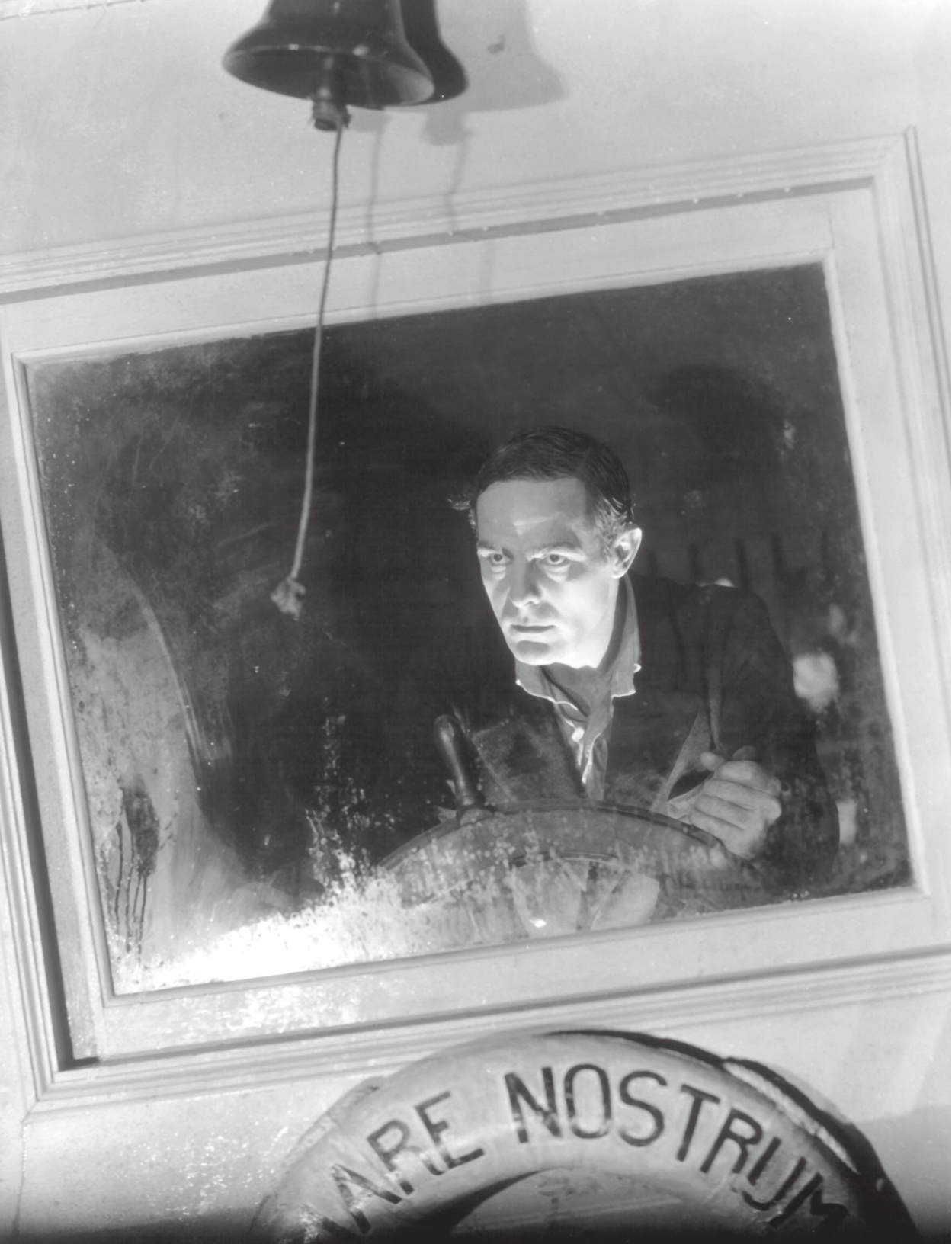
## The Big Diamond Bank Robbery (1929)

Tom's after the bad guys once more in Tony's last picture before retiring to Mix's ranch. He was already out to green pastures when he was billed as the mount in the cowboy star's first sound picture, *Destry Rides Again* (1932). (His replacement, Tony Jr.—sporting four stockings—was passed off as Tony the Wonder Horse until the fall of 1932.) Although he made films before any oversight protected animal actors in the picture business, Tony



was well looked after—a dynamite incident on 1923's *Eyes of the Forest* put both star and rider out of commission temporarily but apparently was Tony's most significant injury over his dozen years on film. As *The Historical Animal* assures, "Horses rarely survived to such advanced ages in captivity without modern veterinary care." Tony lived two years beyond his owner, dying in 1942 at the then-ripe-old-horse age of thirty-two. His death was reported in the *New York Times*.





# MARE NOSTRUM

LIVE MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT BY STEPHEN HORNE  
AND FRANK BOCKIUS

**DIRECTED BY REX INGRAM, USA, 1926**

**CAST** Alice Terry, Antonio Moreno, Uni Apollon, Kada-Abd-el-Kadar, Hughie Mack, Mlle. Kithnou, Michael Brantford, Mme. Paquerette, Fernand Mailly, and Andrews Engelmann **PRODUCTION** Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer **PRINT SOURCE** Warner Bros.

**D**ublin-born director Rex Ingram had his biggest success with 1921's *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*, from the Vicente Blasco Ibáñez novel, which made a star of Valentino, saved the Metro company from bankruptcy, and earned the director the undying gratitude of the head of Metro, Marcus Loew. Alas, in 1924, Metro merged with two other companies—Goldwyn and Mayer. Ingram, a renowned stickler for authenticity and location shooting (like his friend Erich von Stroheim), so loathed Louis B. Mayer that he refused to allow his name on his pictures, crediting only Metro-Goldwyn in *Mare Nostrum*'s main titles.

Before making *Mare Nostrum*, a retelling of the Mata Hari story set during the U-boat campaign, Ingram had longed to make *Ben-Hur*. It was in his contract that even if the picture were made by another company, he would be released to direct it. But Metro production chief June Mathis gave the film to Charles Brabin. When the merger took place and Brabin was fired, Mayer did offer Ingram the job, but Ingram demanded so many conditions that Mayer selected Fred Niblo instead. Still under contract, Ingram emigrated in 1924 to the south of France, where he took over a rundown former Gaumont studio built on the estate of Napoleon's famous General Massena. Using MGM money, Ingram reequipped it, building extra stages and a water tank, and *La Victorine* went on to a prominent place in film history, long before French director François Truffaut immortalized it in 1973's *Day for Night*.

Shot in picturesque locations such as Barcelona, Naples, Paestum, Marseilles, and Pompeii, *Mare Nostrum* took fifteen months to make. As Ruth Barton put it in her 2014 biography of Ingram, "*Mare Nostrum* was to test the will of those who had made the move to France with Rex." The film's scenarist Willis Goldbeck later wrote, "Ingram did *Mare Nostrum* not with any idea it would make money but because he felt it had a chance for a great deal of beauty." Ingram's first biographer, Liam O'Leary, felt that Ingram wanted to capture the mystery of the Mediterranean, with which he had fallen in love. "Filming proceeded under grim conditions," O'Leary wrote. "The glass roofs of the studio created a furnace in the daytime, while at night, when a lot of the filming took place, arctic temperatures were recorded ... French laboratories were found to be unsatisfactory. The London laboratories were too far away. Equipment set up in the studios developed defects and much negative was found to be unusable and necessitated many retakes. Eventually, technicians had to be brought in from Hollywood for this work."

Ingram chose Spanish-born romantic lead Antonio Moreno to play David Glasgow Farragut, named after the American Civil War admiral whose order "Damn the torpedoes. Full speed ahead" passed into legend. Freya Talberg, the Mata Hari character, is played by Alice Terry, married to Ingram since 1921. She considered *Mare Nostrum* the justification for her career—"I felt it was the only picture I ever did." Terry had come from the cutting rooms and never



regarded herself as an actress, nor did she enjoy the experience. Naturally brunette, she only worked wearing a blonde wig. Making everything more difficult, Ingram took multiple takes of each scene. When it came to the symbolic love scene with an octopus in a tank, she balked. "I wasn't used to playing anyone that thought," she recalled. "I said 'You'd better get rid of me now. I can't look at anyone amorously, let alone a fish.'" In fact, Ingram did one take. It was the quickest scene she ever had to do. (The scene is missing from this print but it influenced Orson Welles to try something similar in *Lady from Shanghai*.)

Perhaps the finest sequence Ingram ever shot was the execution of Freya. For the sake of atmosphere, he hired the same bugle band that had attended the execution of Mata Hari. The 24th Battalion de Chasseurs Alpins, "the Blue Devils," also appeared in the sequence, photographed at Vincennes, near the Pathé factory, where such executions had so frequently been carried out.

Editor Grant Whytock estimated that the rough cut of the film reached twenty-three thousand feet (more than four hours). "We must have thrown away ten or twelve cut reels and we still ended up with two hours of film." When Ibáñez saw this version, in October 1925, he wrote to Ingram, "Of all the stories I have written, *Mare Nostrum* is my favorite. For that reason, only to a great artist like yourself could I trust it to be put into motion pictures." It is safe to assume that many important scenes were eliminated on orders from MGM's front office, including some anti-German scenes after complaints from the German Embassy. An abbreviated version of 115 minutes had its premiere at the Criterion Theatre, New York, on February 15, 1926. The initial reviews and public response were encouraging. But according to *Motion Picture* magazine, it was a cold premiere. A flop. The aquarium love scenes were the most annoying they had witnessed.

*Variety* considered it "draggy" and reported that the depiction of the enemy drew snickers on the first

night. "Besides which," *Variety* continued, "it's a gruesome tale without a solid laugh during the entire telling." Nonetheless, the picture did good business in New York for a while thanks to the Italian and Spanish population, smashing records at the Capitol, grossing \$118,249 in two weeks.

In August came the French premiere, attended by the prime minister, infuriating the Germans who banned the film. Andrews Engelmann (the U-boat commander) became a figure of hate in Germany. An angry Fritz Lang told him "You are no longer German!"—which was correct. He was Baltic Russian. MGM, facing a boycott from Central Europe, gave a formal promise to refrain from the production of pictures "tending to provoke international animosity." The studio began making films portraying the Germans in a more favorable light, as in *Flesh and the Devil* and *The Student Prince in Old Heidelberg*.

*Mare Nostrum* gradually slumped at the box office. The title didn't help: Ingram had fought as hard to retain the original Latin as he had to keep the tragic ending. He had even been reluctant to add the subtitle "Our Sea" until he was reminded that some people thought the picture was a western. (Broadway wags called it "Horse Liniment.") Perhaps the most wounding criticism was that *Mare Nostrum* was out of date. "Ingram has been away from these shores a long time," said *Variety*. "It wouldn't do any harm to take a jaunt back here if for nothing else than to sit around, talk with the boys and glance over what they're doing in picture work."

"For my part," wrote Ingram in 1928, "I am not racking my brains to find a novel form of expression. My aim has always been to tell my story as directly, as simply and as naturally as I could ... To take people out of their seats into the land where my drama is being unfolded. To interest them in my characters rather than in my players. Whether I tell them they are on the Marseilles waterfront, inside a German submarine, in Baghdad, or in the Sahara desert, I



want them to accept my statement without question; something they will never do when they know that my Sahara was in Bakersfield, my Marseilles waterfront was built at Venice, California, and my bit-actors and extras were all seen in a sexual epic the week before."

Ingram made only four more films. When he refused to return to America, MGM did not renew his contract. He made a British-financed film about industrial conflict, *The Three Passions*. After a long gap, he produced his only sound picture, *Baroud*, filmed in Morocco, in which he also played the lead. It was a failure, although Hollywood offered him an acting contract. In 1934 he moved to Cairo, traveling around North Africa and writing a novel. He returned

to California in 1936, rejoining Alice Terry and occupying himself with sculpture and writing and travel. He had apparently lost interest in filmmaking, although he formed a friendship with John Wayne and they discussed projects for a couple of years before the director's death in 1950.

— **Kevin Brownlow**



# A Letter from Location

*Part of a regular series in Picture-Play, this letter addressed to magazine correspondent Myrtle Gebhart was published in its February 1926 issue.*

Dear Myrtle,

I have started to write you several times during the four months I have been here with the "Mare Nostrum" company, but something has always interrupted.

Nice was a pleasant surprise. Rex and Antonio Moreno and his wife met us at the station.

Our studio is about two miles from Nice, on a slight elevation overlooking the sea. My dressing room is on the second floor of the studio villa and has a marvelous view.

We have seventeen nationalities in the company, so I have learned a few words of many languages. I shall be able to converse with anybody in Hollywood when I return!

I have been to Monte Carlo several times, as it is less than an hour by machine from Nice. My first visit to the famous Casino was quite a shock. I had expected to see a gay and well-dressed crowd throwing their money away. Instead I saw seated at the green tables mostly elderly men and women with little system books they have figured out for breaking the bank. They play very carefully. Some have been there every day for years. They win occasionally, and all hope their "systems" will make them fortunes.

Our first location trips were along the Riviera and to the pretty villages in the mountains back of Nice, towns hundreds of years old that still retain their individuality.

Our first long trip was to Italy. We sailed from Monaco on the Providence, and after a twenty-four-hour trip, landed at Naples. We passed near the island of Corsica, where Napoleon was born, and saw a number of other small islands with picturesque little villages.

I had a great thrill when I sighted Mount Vesuvius with its smoking crater. I was having luncheon when Rex called me to the deck and there, towering in front of us was the old mountain, with clouds of smoke pouring out just like what you see on postal cards. It looked like a giant threatening the city of Naples and the small towns huddled at its base.

The landing in Naples was funny. The Providence did not dock, so the passengers were taken off in row boats. You know how excitable ONE Italian can be. Well, you can imagine what happens when two hundred of them get together in row boats fighting for passengers. I expected to see knives thrown.

The first evening, Tony, Mrs. Moreno, and I dined at a little café on the Santa Lucia, a narrow strip of land extending several hundred feet out from the mainland. The little harbor was bright with yachts and fishing boats. The restaurants specialize in the famous Neapolitan fish dishes and spaghetti. We were serenaded by mandolin and guitar players.

The boatman sing as they row; the cab drivers and everybody else sing as they work.

We worked in the center of the old district where hundreds of families live in one building. Thousands of children play in the narrow streets. When we threw out a handful of small coins, there was such a struggle for them it took several carabinieri to quiet the riot.

After four days in Naples, we traveled by machine to Pompeii, fifty miles. For three days we lived in a little hotel a few yards from the entrance to the famous ruins of the buried city. We could hear Vesuvius rumbling day and night, like a cross old man. Every one of us felt nervous. At night the sky is lighted up by the explosions.

Some of the things that have been dug up are well preserved. It is marvelous that such things as statuary and paintings could be in such good condition. There are frying pans and other cooking utensils that were dug up, more than eighteen hundred years old. I saw an eggshell that had been found among the ruins.

Rex decided next to go to Paestum to photograph the famous temples built by the Greeks, started in 600 BC and still in good condition. It was necessary to organize a motor caravan, as it is almost a hundred miles from Pompeii over roads that are seldom traveled.

We left Pompeii at three in the morning and arrived in Paestum about nine. We were certainly a sight, for we "ate" dust all the way. One of our cameramen, who had a dark beard and mustache, looked like Santa Claus when he arrived.

The temples are wonderful, and well worth the hard trip. It is unbelievable that the early Greeks could have constructed such temples without machinery. Some of the sections of the pillars weigh tons.

Thousands of lizards swarmed over the place. I know I saw five thousand. Not one of us was anxious to remain overnight, as it was a most depressing place. According to the caretaker, even the ancient races deserted Paestum soon after the temples were constructed.

From there we went to Venice. I was never more thrilled in my life than when I stepped into a gondola. There were two gondoliers, one in front and one in back, and it was surprising how quickly we reached our hotel. On the way, we passed many beautiful gondolas belonging to private individuals, others loaded with vegetables going to market. They even have a fire department and a jail on gondolas.

The quietness impressed me—no automobiles, no street cars nor bicycles. Nothing except gondolas and an occasional motor boat.

At night Venice is indescribable. After dinner most of the people take a gondola ride, or promenade in the Piazza San Marco. On the canals, stringed orchestras play as they go. No wonder Venice is called the most romantic city in the world.

Sincerely, ALICE TERRY



# TRAPPOLA

## LIVE MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT BY THE MONT ALTO MOTION PICTURE ORCHESTRA

**DIRECTED BY** EUGENIO PEREGO, ITALY, 1922

**CAST** Leda Gys, Suzanne Fabre, Gian Paolo Rosmino, and Ernesto Masucci **PRODUCTION** Lombardo Film

**PRINT SOURCE** Cineteca Italiana, Milano

Preceded by recently restored footage shot shortly after the 1906 San Francisco earthquake

**A**fter World War II, Rome became a center of international film production, not only as the hub of the Italian film industry, but also by attracting moviemakers from around the world as a cost-effective and picturesque location for increasingly spectacular international productions. But long before Rome became the center of Europe's cinematic universe, Naples—poorer, messier, and more chaotic than its northern neighbor—had been on the forefront of Italy's moviemaking. Months before the Lumière brothers' camera arrived in Naples in 1890, a local inventor had patented a similar contraption, only to be driven out of business by the Frenchmen's superior version. Soon after, at least one of the city's music halls was converted to screen films, then several more theaters opened exclusively to show movies.

In 1904, a nineteen-year-old Neapolitan law student named Gustavo Lombardo abandoned university to distribute motion pictures, and a few years later became the sole distributor of Charlie Chaplin's films in south central Italy. By 1919, his company, Lombardo Film (later, Titanus Films), was not only distributing but also producing motion pictures from its Naples studio that had belonged to the recently defunct Polifilms. Like other Neapolitan production companies, Lombardo frequently focused on stories about southerners, shooting around the region and providing unparalleled views of customs and life in the south. Among Lombardo's biggest successes were the films that starred the vivacious Leda Gys.

The Rome-born Gys likely made her screen debut in 1912—it is difficult to confirm her first movie appearance because most of her more than eighty films are lost. Her then-lover, the poet Carlo Alberto Salustri, known as Trilussa, reportedly suggested her professional name, a near-anagram of her real first name, Giselda. Early in her career Gys appeared in more than two dozen short films, with titles such as *Leda Innamorata* (1914), which showed off her flair for comedy. Gys's first important role in a feature was as the Virgin Mary in the 1916 religious epic *Christus*, and she also appeared in her share of the so-called "diva" films, the Italian melodramas of the era that featured strong female protagonists portrayed by dynamic and charismatic stars such as Lyda Borelli, Francesca Bertini, and Pina Menichelli. Diva movies were filled with over-the-top acting, sweeping emotions, grand gestures, glamorous costumes, and lush decors. Gys also worked in Spain and France. But it was not until she began a personal and professional relationship with Lombardo in the late 1910s and settled with him in Naples that her gift for comedy broadened her horizons, just as the craze for diva films was waning. The films Lombardo and Gys made together combined the style of modern American cinema with Italian themes, and Gys was the ideal actress for them. She was, as one Italian film reference noted, "more Cinderella than vamp."

According to film historian Angela Dalle Vacche, "Gys specialized in positive female roles, playing naïve or innocent young women caught in evil webs and manipulated by family members and suitors."





Dalle Vacche writes that Gys's characters combined the "girl-next-door innocence of Mary Pickford and the suffering pathos of Lillian Gish." If so, then Gys's role as the mischievous orphan in *Trappola* is on the rollicking end of the Pickford spectrum. Some of Gys's characters may have been divas, but the star had a sense of humor about them and Italian fans and critics noticed and approved. "The audience laughs, and laughs with pleasure when it sees La Gys caricature Bertini or [Maria] Carmi. We suggest an imitation of Borelli!" a reviewer wrote of one her performances, referring to an unholy trinity of Italian divas.

Gys's wit, sparkling and assured, is on full display in *Trappola*. By that time, she had moved away from the suffering diva roles and appeared to relish the opportunity to lampoon them. Her character in *Trappola*, also named Leda, is a good-hearted student at a convent boarding school who runs away to help a friend whose boyfriend has left her. Leda's comic misadventures include recovering stolen

jewels, being arrested and jailed, and getting work as an extra on a movie set and out-diva-ing the diva. Along the way, there is plenty of satire of convent life, the hypocrisy and greed of the clergy, and the ridiculousness of moviemaking. Surprisingly for such a lighthearted and guileless comedy, *Trappola* ran into problems with censorship. According to Vittorio Martinelli's history of Italian silent cinema, censors objected to scenes "in which Leda dances on the kitchen table, surrounded by other schoolgirls; that in which ... she appears in a chemise and then in knickers; when Leda is in prison with a group of no-goods; and that scene repeated several times of kisses exchanged by Claudio and Furetta in unseemly poses."

Critics of the era lauded Gys's satirical take on the diva in *Trappola*. According to a review in Turin's daily newspaper *La Stampa*, "this is an amiable and stinging satire on certain 'prima donnas of the cinema,' maudlin or worse. Leda Gys pokes fun at her colleagues with grace and good taste. The film

reveals many risqué backstage scenes at the studios, showing the audience the Eleusinian mysteries of film-making."

Dalle Vacche notes that Gys was the only Italian diva who never played vamps and whose career spanned the entire silent era. Another historian of early cinema, Richard Abel, writes that Gys's popularity spread beyond her native Italy, noting that she "specialized in the playful Neapolitan type" and was a favorite of Italian immigrant audiences in the United States and in South America as well. After Gys and Lombardo married in 1932, she retired to raise their son Goffredo, who grew up to become a producer.

*Trappola* director Eugenio Perego was one of Gys and Lombardo's favorite collaborators. He directed ten of Gys's films, and all his films after 1924 starred Gys. Several of their films together featured Neapolitan themes with titles in the local dialect, such as *Napuli è'na canzone* ("Naples Is a Song," 1927). Perego appears to have had a knack for working with women, directing another Italian diva, Pina Menichelli, in several films, including the popular *Il padrone delle ferriere*, a 1919 adaptation of the French novel *Le Maître de forges* (*The Ironmaster*). He also codirected *La Vagabonda* (1918) along with its French star, Musidora. Perego began his film career in 1913, as one of the writers of an early film adaptation of the classic Italian novel, *The Betrothed*. His directing career apparently ended with the silent film era.

In the early 1930s, Titanus Films moved to Rome and today continues to distribute features and produce films for Italian television. The company was headed by Goffredo Lombardo, the son of Leda Gys and Gustavo Lombardo, until his death in 2005, and he in turn was succeeded by his son Guido. Among the company's 21st century productions were a biographical film about Gys's former lover, the poet Trilussa, and a 2010 documentary *The Last Leopard: A Portrait of Goffredo Lombardo*, directed by Cinema Paradiso's Giuseppe Tornatore.

— **Margarita Landazuri**



## SAN FRANCISCO 1906 FOOTAGE RESTORATION

The same Miles Brothers who shot *A Trip Down Market Street* just four days before the 1906 San Francisco earthquake also took their camera on another trip down the city's main artery to survey the ruins. This nine-minute segment, recently recovered at a California flea market, was identified by David Kiehn, the same Niles Essanay Silent Film Museum historian who had determined that *A Trip Down Market Street* was filmed so close to the estimated eight-point temblor that rocked the City by the Bay. The recovered footage is actually a composite of three films, showing not only from Fifth Street down to the Ferry Building, but also City Hall and, in a section tinted in red, the demolition of Prager's Department Store at Jones Street. Restored by the San Francisco Silent Film Festival in partnership with Silver Shadows Gallery Ltd and the Essanay museum, these rarities are a small portion of the almost two hours of footage that the Miles Brothers shot of the devastated city.





# THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES

LIVE MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT BY THE  
GUENTER BUCHWALD ENSEMBLE

**DIRECTED BY RICHARD OSWALD, GERMANY, 1929**

**CAST** Carlyle Blackwell, George Seroff, Fritz Rasp, Livio Pavanelli, Betty Bird, Alexander Murski, Jaro Fürth, Valy Arnheim, and Alma Taylor **PRODUCTION** Erda-Film **PRINT SOURCE** SFSFF Collection

**T**he last silent film to feature Arthur Conan Doyle's eminent detective has been less a legend than a rumor among cinephiles and Sherlockians. *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (*Der Hund von Baskerville*), a seven-reel film with a long German pedigree that even included a movie written while the country was fighting a ghastly war against the detective's homeland, has long been considered the most important of the *Hounds* made in Europe. Long pronounced lost, it was filmed in Berlin in early 1929 when German studios were the envy of the world and then almost immediately dropped out of sight. Until recently it was remembered, if at all, for its eerie red poster of a wolfhound exhaling a torch-like light over ghostly ruins.

The film was directed by Richard Oswald, a respected filmmaker with a strong connection to both Holmes and the *Hound*. For cultural historians, Oswald is famous for directing *Different from the Others* (1919) starring Conrad Veidt, a powerful attack on Germany's anti-sodomy laws and a gay rights landmark. But this was only one of eighty-three silent features Oswald directed. In a prolific career, he wrote, produced, and directed thrillers, horror films, historical romances, romantic farces, spicy sex exposés, and, after sound came in, musical comedies and operettas.

*Hound* was one of his last silents, marked by an international cast—the six leads hail from six different countries—and, even though made by a small Berlin studio (some might say fly-by-night), lavish sets and bravura camerawork. His Holmes was Carlyle Blackwell, an American with a colorful acting

career as a matinee idol for Vitagraph beginning in 1910 and later leading roles in British features. His Holmes projects the genial warmth of a brainy cruise director perpetually on the alert. He plays off George Seroff's bashful Watson, in arguably the first Holmes film to make the Holmes-Watson friendship a central part of the story. True, Seroff turns Watson into an adoring naïf, but Seroff gives personality to a character who up to now had been notoriously colorless or missing altogether in Holmes silents. The best-known actor in the cast, however, is Fritz Rasp as Stapleton, Germany's ubiquitous film villain. He is one of the few Germans in the cast (the film's Sir Henry Baskerville is Italian; Beryl Stapleton is Austrian; Dr. Mortimer is Czech), best known today as the scoundrel who seduces Louise Brooks in *Diary of a Lost Girl* and the thief pursued by children in *Emil and the Detective*. But Rasp, too, is overwhelmed by the film's true scene stealer: the *Hound's* moor, a vast indoor set built inside the abandoned Staaken zeppelin hanger, rivaling in enormity even what 20th Century Fox built for Basil Rathbone ten years later.

The film never came to the United States, but it played from one end of Europe to the other. When Conan Doyle visited the continent in October 1929 he could have seen his story screened in Germany, Italy, or the Benelux countries. Instead he attended its Danish premiere in Copenhagen, shortly before the film opened throughout Scandinavia, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Ukraine. The film did well enough that Pathé then released a shortened version for the home movie market on 9.5mm. The Nazis even



remade it in 1937, produced by screen star Anny Ondra. This was the version Hitler kept in his retreat at Berchtesgaden.

So why, with all this success, have you never heard of it? Most likely because the film was never released over here. By August of 1929, the fateful year when the film opened, American movie houses had been mostly converted to sound and were no longer in the market for silent pictures, least of all foreign-language imports with no big-name movie stars. Its fate was sealed when UK's Gainsborough Pictures decided to make a talkie version of *The Hound* two years later and, despite mediocre reviews, found a way into the English-language markets that Oswald's film never could.

What American audiences missed was a strange, fascinating hybrid: part Conan Doyle, but mainly descended from a uniquely German line of adaptation. Oswald himself was an important part of that tradi-

tion. He had written a stage version of *The Hound* in 1906 and, thanks to his brief career at Berlin's Deutsche Vitascope Company, worked on the highly popular Sherlock Holmes series starring Alwin Neuss. These include his first film adaptation of *Hound*, a feature based not on his own play but the far more famous—though no less eccentric—version written by German matinee idol Ferdinand Bonn.

These became Oswald's bizarre Teutonic templates. That 1914 Vitascope film feature, for instance—the one Oswald adapted and Rudolf Meinert directed—is arguably the zaniest *Hund* ever produced. For starters, it is set, like Bonn's play, in Scotland, meant to exude Sir Walter Scott's atmosphere of weirs and haunted castles. From the waist down, the villagers look straight out of "The Banks and Braes of Bonnie Doon"; from the waist up they're in Old Heidelberg. Nor will viewers soon forget Holmes disguised as the villain with the villain disguised as Holmes in a shootout broken up by a manservant hidden inside a

suit of medieval armor. This is Holmes reconfigured as a Nick Carter action figure confronting a villain out of a Feuillade serial, the two of them puffing away amid torture chambers, sliding panels, and booby-trapped libraries.

By 1929, the now-seasoned director had calmed down considerably, and the film that emerged was not only recognizable as Conan Doyle's tale, but also a highly effective thriller. However, the earlier German productions tag merrily along. The secret panels, the suit of armor with moving eyes, and Stapleton's diabolical booby traps are all still here, with new add-ons. Stapleton now has a bow and arrow; Baskerville Hall has a portrait of the hellhound, a cross between a dog and a dragon; Holmes is slimed in an underground mud slurry; and a telephone with an extra-long cord is turned into a diabolical tool. The wittiest innovation: Watson reading Edgar Wallace's crime story *The Squeaker* in bed while the boards creak in the hall. Could Watson merely be imagining Edgar Wallace's squeak, or is the squeaker real? More intriguing, could Oswald be plugging his production company's 1929 film version of *Der Zinker*, also featuring a villainous Fritz Rasp?

So, Conan Doyle purists are hereby warned. But what makes this fun, rather than simply absurd, is the great sincerity and energy with which it's made, perfectly capturing the pleasures of a Saturday morning entertainment. Oswald had learned a thing or two from the great German masters, particularly Paul Leni whose American productions *The Cat and the Canary* and *The Man Who Laughs* had enjoyed great success in Berlin, and he applies the chiaroscuro lighting, odd angles, and creep-along camera movements with great relish.

The film's discovery, when it came, had its own *Hound*-like features. A 35mm nitrate original with Czech intertitles was found in 2009 in the Polish industrial city of Sosnowiec, along with nine other silent films, their existence revealed by what Conan Doyle would have called "an odor of decay and

heavy miasmic vapor." They had been stored—some accounts say hidden—in the basement of a parish priest who had had a weakness for collecting foreign (that is, non-Polish) films and screening them for friends. However, by the time he died, several of the films were decomposing. Sensibly, the collection was donated to Poland's National Film Archive in Warsaw, where *The Hound* remained untouched for the better part of a decade. Financial and political factors prevented the archive from attempting an immediate restoration, but a partnership with the San Francisco Silent Film Festival broke the Gordian knot. The great news: what survived was not a worn-out exhibition dupe, but an original distribution master in near-mint condition. True, a reel was missing, but some of that footage has been supplied from a 9.5mm Pathé-Baby print held by a film collector in Vienna. Almost ninety years after its original release, the unleashed *Hund* is at last ready for a new run.

— Russell Merritt

## SFSFF RESTORATION

The restoration of *Der Hund von Baskerville* is based on an original 35mm nitrate print held by Poland's National Film Archive, with some missing scenes bridged with a Pathé-Baby print belonging to Michael Seeber of FILM Verlag. German censor records provided a complete document of the original intertitles, allowing for a restored version in the original German, which was then translated for a second version in English. However, a significant portion of the film is still missing from reels 2 and 3. The narrative gap is bridged with a series of still images from the collection of Deutsches Filminstitut and the storyline was gleaned from a draft shooting script and the censor record. A partnership between the Polish National Film Archive (Filmoteka Narodowa–Instytut Audiowizualny) and the San Francisco Silent Film Festival, this restoration was made possible through the generous support of Glen Miranker, the Sunrise Foundation for Education and the Arts, Rick Andersen, and John and Susan Sinnott.

— Robert Byrne







# THE SAGA OF GÖSTA BERLING

LIVE MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT BY THE MATTI BYE ENSEMBLE

**DIRECTED BY MAURITZ STILLER, SWEDEN, 1924**

**CAST** Lars Hanson, Gerda Lundequist, Sixten Malmerfelt, Karin Swanström, Jenny Hasselquist, Ellen Cederström, Greta Garbo, Torsten Hammarén, and Mona Mårtenson **PRODUCTION** Svenska Filmindustri

**PRINT SOURCE** Swedish Film Institute

**N**ot only are there countless stories of great talents destroyed by Hollywood, but you could, if you were in a gloomy frame of mind, make a case that this is an overarching theme of the place. With so many tragedies to choose from, it's hard to stand out. But *The Saga of Gösta Berling* (*Gösta Berlings saga*) shows that what happened to director Mauritz Stiller was a special kind of depressing.

Originally released in two parts that ran almost four hours, *Gösta Berling* was Stiller's last film as an auteur in control of all aspects of production. He was (along with Victor Sjöström) the most prominent director in Sweden on the strength of films such as *Sir Arne's Treasure* (1919) and *Erotikon* (1920). Shot in the historical Swedish province of Värmland over a period of six months, to accommodate the change of seasons, *Gösta Berling* makes outstanding use of the area's dense forest scenery and frozen lakes. The movie is based on the debut novel by Selma Lagerlöf, the first woman to win the Nobel prize in literature. Its major set pieces include a breathtaking chase across the frozen surface of a lake and a fire scene to rival *Gone With the Wind*'s burning of Atlanta. It engrosses, moving swiftly despite the long runtime. *Gösta Berling* is, in fact, marvelous. Yet virtually every time the movie is mentioned it's for one thing—GarboGarboGarboGarboGarbo.

*Gösta Berling* was Greta Garbo's big break, her first substantial film role, and Stiller was her mentor, the man who styled her "Garbo" to replace the "Gustafson" she was born with, which wasn't exactly a name to quicken the pulse or dominate a marquee. No one who sees *Gösta Berling* will walk away

unimpressed by her. It isn't hard to tell what made MGM's Louis B. Mayer, who saw the film on a trip to Berlin where it was playing to packed houses, sit bolt upright and demand to meet her.

But from a distance of almost a hundred years, it's evident that Garbo—only eighteen years old and so beautiful it is said her close-ups made audiences gasp—is just one of many impressive things about *Gösta Berling*. As the story unfolds, the title's ex-pastor, played by Lars Hanson, has been defrocked. Gösta's preaching is so enthralling that his congregation is ready to forgive him for his latest drunken escapade, but then, spurred by idealism and a bridge-burning compulsion that gets him in trouble throughout, Gösta swings into a rousing condemnation of the parishioners' own chronic boozing. His goose thus self-cooked, he sets out on the road. Stiller films Hanson as a dark speck on the cold forest road, slowly coming forward until his white face becomes the sole pinpoint of life. Gösta, shivering in a thin coat, stops to pick up an injured bird, holds it against himself to warm up, and shuffles on.

An attempt at comprehensive plot summary could send a person into a Gösta-like spiral, but on screen the sprawling network of characters is as vivid as any in Dickens. The film plays rather like an epic about alcoholism. Alcohol fuels Gösta's downfall and many other calamities in the script, although other sins (lust, pride, sloth ...) get a workout as well. Another theme is that of being cast out from society. Gösta is far from the only character to become a pariah. After his defrocking and some other setbacks, he joins a group of carousing Napoleonic War veterans,



the “Cavaliers,” the kind of men who drink straight from the bottle and never stand on the floor if a table is available. Failures in life who have nowhere else to go, they have attached themselves to a great estate, Ekeby, ostensibly protecting it but capable of ransacking it if the opportunity arises.

Gösta, the sole handsome face in the group, breaks the hearts of several beautiful young women. “Women will be the death of you, Gösta,” he is informed in one intertitle. “Go drink yourself into oblivion.” Nothing could be further from the truth. Women are the best things in Gösta’s life. Time and again, they rescue him from his latest piece of folly. They have courage and compassion.

Gösta’s first love is a pupil he is hired to tutor, Ebba (Mona Mårtenson), who carries around her prayer book, talks a lot about the wonders of Creation, and falls in love with him. Stiller portrays her as essentially an overdramatic teenager and, when she dies of sorrow upon learning of Gösta’s past, her absence isn’t felt much. Much more interesting is Marianne, a cousin of Ebba, played by the Swedish prima ballerina Jenny Hasselquist. Pretty, vivacious Marianne is kissed by Gösta, with consequences that make the fate of Lily Bart in *The House of Mirth* look like a picnic in comparison. The sequence in which Marianne, locked out of her own house by her outraged father, wanders through the snow without knowing where to go or what to do, is as harrowing in its way as Lillian Gish’s similar ordeal in *Way Down East*.

But the true female lead of *Gösta Berling* is Margarethe, a.k.a. “the Major’s wife,” played by distinguished stage actress Gerda Lundequist, often described as either the Sarah Bernhardt or the Helen Hayes of Sweden. She didn’t make many movies but she commands the screen, capable both of subtlety of expression and the kind of big gestural acting that the more sensational moments require. Margarethe inspires love from her first appearance, in which she is seen slapping the daylights out of a man who is beating a cart horse. She is the mistress

of Ekeby, rough and tough when commanding the Cavaliers and her workers, elegant and charming as the hostess of Ekeby’s grand balls.

But, like Gösta himself, Margarethe has a self-destructive streak, as well as a dark secret about how she inherited Ekeby in the first place. Margarethe will eventually be forced out of her home but, one night, returns to burn the place to the ground in an astonishing scene of what Garbo biographer Barry Paris calls “pyromaniacal glee.” The burning involves obviously real flames engulfing very large sets, and actors and stuntpeople dashing around in evident peril. It was a great technical feat for its time and, according to Paris, “the most expensive scene ever shot in Sweden.”

Introduced about forty minutes into the picture is the one woman who manages to save Gösta and have it stick: Countess Elisabeth Dohna, Garbo’s breakout role. When we meet her, she is recently married to a rich nincompoop (Torsten Hammarén). But Elisabeth is warm, understanding, pure, almost Melanie Hamilton (in which case, Gösta is Scarlett). She falls for Gösta immediately, a fact that Stiller loves to emphasize with close-ups of his discovery. Garbo had, he said, a face “that you get in front of the camera only once in the century.” Made nervous by Stiller whose idea of on-set coaching was to bellow things like “You move your legs like a gatepost!”, Garbo sipped champagne before those close-ups and it turns out that being slightly drunk looks a lot like love. By far the most erotic scene that Hanson and Garbo share is a trek by horsedrawn sled across a vast frozen lake, a pack of wolves in hot pursuit. Stiller’s momentum and pacing are superb, as he cuts back and forth between the sled on the lake, Gösta’s reckless exhilaration, and Elisabeth, who doesn’t know whether she is being rescued or abducted, but is excited by either possibility.

It was a smashing debut, but Garbo’s achievements were ahead of her. For Stiller, that was not the case. Together with Garbo he went to Hollywood, where

MGM denied him the opportunity to direct its new star in her first American film, *The Torrent*. Stiller was assigned to Garbo’s second film, *The Temptress*, only to be fired by Irving Thalberg when it became clear Stiller only knew how to direct his own way. Stiller wound up at Paramount, where he adjusted enough to American studio strictures to helm the successful *Hotel Imperial*, starring Pola Negri. Then, he fought with the studio over retakes on *The Street of Sin* and was replaced by Josef von Sternberg. Depressed and in ill health, Stiller sailed back to Sweden where he died a year later in 1928.

*Gösta Berling* itself has had a checkered fate. The film was cut down to one part for most international releases, then shortened even more dramatically in 1927 to about half its original length. As the years went by, missing scenes were discovered and replaced, with a 2006 restoration, released in the U.S. by Kino International, running about 184 minutes.

The Swedish Film Institute has since located more footage, and the *Gösta Berling* being screened at the festival is sixteen minutes longer, with its color tinting restored and the intertitles re-created to match the originals.

Go back to the 1990 obituaries for Greta Garbo, amid the tributes to her ineffable screen magic, you’ll notice a recurring bit of trivia: Her favorite of her own films was *The Saga of Gösta Berling*. She still considered Stiller her greatest director. This restoration, as close to the original 1924 premiere as we are likely to get, offers a fresh opportunity to see why the immortal Garbo held them both in such high regard.

— **Farran Smith Nehme**

**Jon Wengström, curator of archival film collections at the Swedish Film Institute (SFI), accepts the Silent Film Festival Award for his and SFI’s contribution to silent film preservation. Read an interview with Wengström on pages 14–15.**







# SERGE BROMBERG PRESENTS ...

WITH LIVE MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT BY DONALD SOSIN

Today when we go to the movies, we can sink into multiplex recliners and absorb the show without acknowledging or interacting with another human being. More than a hundred years ago, early cinema offered an alternative experience, with active audience engagement encouraged by a showman who might introduce the film, narrate its action, or lead the audience in a lantern slide sing-along between reels.

The magician-turned-filmmaker Georges Méliès is perhaps the most prominent exemplar of this tradition, turning out fantastical, often hand-colored films such as *A Trip to the Moon* (1902) and *The Impossible Voyage* (1904). These proto-Surrealist tableaux were often tied together with live, scripted narration that valiantly attempted to pass off these flights of untrammelled fancy as stories with discernible plots.

The archivist Serge Bromberg carries on the Méliès tradition in the 21st century, putting the show back into showmanship with his storied "Saved from the Flames" events, which pull together odd and unaccountable films from the vaults of his company, Lobster Films. His latest presentation includes world premieres of two new Georges Méliès restorations and several short films demonstrating unique and rarely exhibited stereoscopic processes. Here's a bit about them in no particular order, as anything can happen at a Bromberg show.

## GEORGES MÉLIÈS Merry Frolics of Satan (1906)

Edward Wagenknecht, a scholar of the silent era who actually lived through it, jokes in his 1962 survey *The Movies in the Age of Innocence* that the devil was perhaps the screen's first star and recalls that early cinematic depictions of hell—"a very beautiful place, full of couches and bowers and drapes and hangings"—made him "wonder if it was not possible that the place might have been maligne." The devil certainly gets his due in one of Georges Méliès's most beloved films, which plays like a cross between *Faust* and *Cinderella*, complete with a starlit coach flight led by an undead horse skeleton. Méliès himself plays Satan, and "merry" is certainly the right word to describe this bon vivant of the second-hand soul market.

## Robinson Crusoe (1902)

Although Méliès's work is prized for its specifically Gallic absurdity, he also took on projects that required considerable cultural and linguistic translation, not least his adaptation of Daniel

Defoe's quintessentially English novel *Robinson Crusoe*. For a man who had already been to the moon and back, the more earthbound special effects still posed a considerable challenge, as emphasized in this passage from Méliès's script: "A thunderstorm breaks forth and dazzling lightning illuminates the rocks and landscape. This new effect in cinematography is obtained by an entirely new method never before utilised, and is of the most strikingly realistic character—the flashes of lightning being an exact counterpart of those in nature—and lends a wonderful sense of realism to the picture."

*Robinson Crusoe* was also among the first works to feature Méliès's Star Film logo incorporated into the set design, a clever early attempt at anti-piracy that worked all too well for *Crusoe*: the film was known to survive only in a ninety-second fragment until a more complete copy was donated to the Cinémathèque Française in 2011. This new restoration from Lobster Films uses a scanning process that better preserves the original colors.



### Oracle of Delphi (1903), Magic Cauldron (1903), and Mysterious Retort (1906)

Alongside efforts to develop color and sound motion pictures through the 1910s and 1920s, several inventors, tinkers, and technicians labored to present films in three dimensions. The primary hurdle was not necessarily photographing a film in 3D—the basic principle had been amply demonstrated in still photography—but developing a system that could reliably project the film before an audience in all its stereoscopic glory. The early experiments with red-green anaglyph 3D, such as Edwin S. Porter and William E. Waddell's now-lost demonstration film of 1915 and William Van Doren Kelley's Plasticon films from 1922–1923, were technically impressive but regarded as not much more than a novelty.

Georges Méliès was not a pioneer of the 3D film—at least not knowingly. Méliès never endeavored to create a system for recording and projecting 3D films, but he inadvertently excelled at the first half of that equation. This was one magic trick that he apparently never realized he had achieved: the Méliès camera rig that quietly turned out 3D-ready negatives had been constructed for another purpose entirely.

Owing to the supply chain issues that arose from maintaining distribution offices in New York and Paris, Méliès often exposed two negatives for each of his films. Given the limitations of duping stocks at the time, it was common practice throughout the silent period to make one negative to meet domestic demand and another for international distribution, often assembled from different takes. What set Méliès's films apart were his “trick shots,” which required that the two negatives be exposed *simultaneously* to preserve his precisely timed and calibrated effects. Amazingly, Méliès's custom-built dual-lensed camera had just the right offset between lenses to record a convincing stereoscopic image. For the handful of films recorded by this camera for which both the American and French negative survive, Lobster has been able to create a digital

approximation of these unwitting experiments in depth. These films were not meant to be exhibited in 3D, but the fact that they can be readily adapted for that format is a testament to Méliès's technical exactitude more than a century ago.

### LOUIS AND AUGUSTE LUMIÈRE L'Arrivée d'un train, 1935

It's common today to lament the prevalence of remakes and reboots, but they have been a part of cinema since its beginnings. Early remakes were often endorsed by the makers of the original and sometimes were even done by the original directors. Cecil B. DeMille remade his 1914 breakthrough *The Squaw Man* in 1918 and again in 1931. Abel Gance remade his 1919 pacifist landmark *J'Accuse* two decades later on the eve of World War II.

Even the Lumière brothers returned to their famous 1895 film of a train pulling into station some forty years later. The camera remains stationary, as if the succeeding four decades of film grammar never happened, but there's something new after all: anaglyph 3D photography and projection that finally made good on the legend that unsophisticated early filmgoers believed the Lumières' train was about to careen right off the screen. The 3D remake was exhibited in Paris, Lyon, Nice, and Marseilles in 1935.

### RENÉ BÜNZLI Selections from the Animateur Stéréoscopique, c. 1900

Although no single system for stereoscopic films achieved a dominant market position in the silent era, the basic concept was familiar from other media. Stereoscopic viewers, the 19th century predecessor to the View-Master, which held a 3D photographic card at a fixed distance from a pair of prismatic lenses, flourished with a seemingly inexhaustible supply of *cartes-de-visite*—wide postcards that included two side-by-side images of exotic lands, holy monuments, famous figures, and the like recorded from slightly different camera angles. (Savvy-eyed sleuths can still find copies of these mass-produced souvenirs.) Not unlike the earliest



Les Frères Lumière et, voilà, 3D! Photo courtesy of Lobster Films

motion pictures, the stereoscope was meant for a solitary viewer with his or her eyes pressed up against the lenses, rather than an auditorium full of spectators. No wonder the two technologies were soon married.

One of the earliest technicians to experiment with 3D motion pictures was René Bünzli, a French watchmaker who applied his precision engineering to the Animateur Stéréoscopique, patented in 1900. Bünzli merged the principles of the common stereoscopic viewer with a much-simplified version of the basic Kinetoscope concept. A paper strip containing dozens of individual photographs (the left-eye and right-eye images printed side-by-side) is spooled through a series of rollers, with each image flitting past a small stereoscopic viewing port as a crank is turned. When the spool travels at the proper speed, the illusion of motion is thoroughly convincing, akin to the experience of thumbing

through a flipbook. The films designed for Bünzli's system could only last for a few seconds, which meant these journeymen filmmakers got their points across as succinctly as possible. An entire marriage, for instance, can be explained in ten seconds or less.

— Kyle Westphal





# A THROW OF DICE

**LIVE MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT BY GUENTER BUCHWALD  
AND FRANK BOCKIUS**

**DIRECTED BY FRANZ OSTEN, GERMANY/INDIA, 1929**

**CAST** Seeta Devi, Himansu Rai, Charu Roy, Sarada Gupta, and Modhu Bose **PRODUCTION** Himansu Rai  
Films **PRINT SOURCE** British Film Institute National Archive

India's film industry, often referred to as Bollywood, has been a major player in world cinema since 1947 when it exponentially increased movie production with influential directors such as Bimal Roy and Mehboob Khan at the helm, creating a national cinema that came to define the Bollywood archetype. But the silent era was a different story. More than eighty percent of the movies being screened in India at that time were imported from the U.S. and other countries. It wasn't until the mid-1920s that a domestic industry really began to take shape.

A major turning point occurred in 1924 when lawyer-turner-actor Himansu Rai and playwright Niranjan Pal formed a partnership with Franz Osten to produce a film in India with financial backing from the Munich-based Emelka Film Company where Osten was a director. The collaboration was timely because Europeans, particularly in Germany, had become fascinated by Eastern religions and philosophy. German movie audiences had already been tempted by Paul Wegener's *Der Yoghi* (*The Yogi*, 1921) and Joe May's two-part epic *Das indische Grabmal* (*The Indian Tomb*, 1921), written for the screen by Fritz Lang and Thea von Harbou from Harbou's own orientalist novel about the building of the Taj Mahal.

A distinct approach, however, was being offered by the Rai-Pal-Osten collaboration. Not only would their film be shot on real locations in India but it would feature an all-Indian cast and focus on Indian religious and mythological subjects. Osten would direct and his German crew would provide the technical assistance. *The Light of India* (1925), based on Erwin Arnold's poem on the life of Buddha, encouraged a

second collaboration also financed in Europe, *Shiraz* (1928), which, like *The Indian Tomb*, was a fictitious romance about the origins of the Taj Mahal. Their third film, *A Throw of Dice* (*Prapancha Pash*, 1929), turned out to be their biggest box-office triumph.

Based on an episode in the Sanskrit epic poem *Mahabharata*, *A Throw of Dice* is the tale of two royal cousins with adjoining kingdoms. King Sohat (Himansu Rai) and King Ranjit (Charu Roy) share a love of gambling and hunting, but Sohat has ulterior motives for inviting Ranjit on a tiger safari. He wants his henchman Kirkabar (Modhu Bose) to murder Ranjit and stage it as an accident so Sohat can take control of Ranjit's territory. Luckily, Ranjit is only wounded and can be nursed back to health by Kanwa (Sarada Gupta) and his daughter Sunita (Seeta Devi), who live in seclusion nearby. Ranjit and Sunita fall in love and plan to marry, but Sohat, smitten by Sunita's beauty, sets in motion an insidious new plot that culminates in a fateful game of dice.

In many ways, *A Throw of Dice* can be seen as an early prototype of the modern-day Bollywood blockbuster, minus the musical numbers. The film has pageantry, spectacle, attractive leads, and an audience-pleasing good-versus-evil story arc enlivened with romantic passion, deceit, and intrigue on a grand scale. Shot in Rajasthan, the Cecil B. DeMille-worthy production used ten thousand extras, one thousand horses, and fifty elephants from the royal houses of Jaipur, Udaipur, and Mysore. Director Osten and cinematographer Emil Schünemann took advantage of the locations to stage some memorable set pieces, for instance, the



opening jungle trek with its wildlife footage of monkeys, snakes, birds, and crocodiles fleeing the sound of the approaching hunters and the full-scale armed assault on Sohat's kingdom by Ranjit's forces.

Osten's attention to visual detail is often remarkably subtle but effective in transforming inanimate objects like Ranjit's stolen dagger and Sohat's trick dice into supporting players in the royal drama. He skillfully uses montages to convey opulence and exoticism in two atmospheric segments that frame the wedding feast of Ranjit and Sunita. The first introduces an eccentric parade of jugglers, fire-eaters, sword swallowers, snake charmers, and other performers, while the second depicts the elaborate preparation of the main event with scores of metalworkers, weavers, florists, embroiders, and elephant-decorators frantically working in tandem.

*A Throw of Dice*, the crowning achievement of the Rai-Pal-Osten collaboration, held the promise of continued international success for the filmmakers, but their plans were interrupted by unforeseen developments in the industry and the wider world. The arrival of talkies quickly put an end to silent filmmaking and, in a more sinister turn of events, the German film industry fell under the control of the National Socialists who preferred to make films that glorified the ideology of Nazi Germany. Rai and Pal also encountered resistance to their coproductions from the India Cinematograph Committee, which, while concerned with sensitive political and religious content, focused primarily on foreign competition to British releases, in particular from Hollywood.

Despite these setbacks, Rai, Pal, and actress Devika Rani, along with director Franz Osten, went on to form Bombay Talkies in 1934. It became one of the

biggest film studios in India and produced popular movies such as *Achhut Kanya* (1936), a social drama about caste system injustice, and the lavish romance *Kangan* (1939), which helped shape the coming Bollywood style. The year 1934 was also when Osten fled Germany for self-imposed exile in Mumbai, then known as Bombay. Osten was in India in 1940 when arrested by the British and sent to an internment camp, effectively ending his film work with Rai and Pal. After his release, Osten returned home to Bavaria, where he worked at brother Peter's production company through the war then spent his final years as the director of a health spa.

For years, Himansu Rai had been overlooked as an important film pioneer in the development of Indian cinema. The recovery of this trilogy has allowed for a reevaluation of his role, as the three films demonstrate a polished technical expertise and a natural

acting style that influenced future filmmakers. In his own *A Throw of Dice* performance, Rai depicts King Sohat's villainy through feigned generosity and deceitful smiles rather than in melodramatic pantomime.

It is worth noting that Charu Ray, who plays the dashing King Ranjit, rarely acted in films. A Bengali painter and cartoonist, he entered the film industry as a set designer and eventually moved into the director's chair. His 1936 feature *Bangalee* was greatly admired by director Satyajit Ray for its realistic depiction of the Bengali middle class and an overt avoidance of Hollywood influences. *Throw of Dice* lead actress Seeta Devi is a beguiling screen presence who also appeared in *Light of Asia* and *Shiraz* but had few roles in the sound era.

Devika Rani must also be singled out for her contributions to the costumes and sets on *A Throw of Dice*. A designer for a major art studio in London, she had met Rai when he was finishing *Shiraz* and they soon married. They went to Germany for the final edit of *A Throw of Dice* and there Rani became a trainee in the Erich Pommer unit at Ufa. This period, which included working on the set of Josef von Sternberg's *The Blue Angel*, was instrumental in Rani's later career not only as a top actress in Indian sound films but also an influential film producer and studio head.

It is miraculous that *A Throw of Dice* exists today considering that most of the estimated thirteen-hundred silent films made in India were destroyed in film vault fires, leaving only a handful of surviving movies. At some point in 1945, all three films in the Rai-Pal-Osten trilogy were deposited at the British Film Institute where they were forgotten, until recent years when a restoration effort began in earnest to preserve them. Together, they represent a remarkable transition period when impressive technical advances and epic tales of ancient India helped lead the way to a vibrant national cinema.

— Jeff Stafford



Charu Roy (far left) and Himansu Rai (center) facing off.  
Photo courtesy of the British Film Institute





# THE ANCIENT LAW

LIVE MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT BY THE DONALD SOSIN ENSEMBLE

**DIRECTED BY E.A. DUPONT, GERMANY, 1923**

**CAST** Ernst Deutsch, Abraham Morewski, Henny Porten, Robert Garrison, Margarete Schlegel, Grete Berger, Hermann Vallentin, and Jacob Tiedtke **PRODUCTION** Comedia-Film **PRINT SOURCE** Deutsche Kinemathek

It's not true, as some recent news articles have it, that *Das alte Gesetz* (*The Ancient Law*) was forgotten, nor was it lost. Highly praised by Lotte Eisner, the grande dame of Weimar cinema criticism, the film has received a fair amount of attention in academic circles ever since a 1984 restoration, and scholars studying the Jewish presence in German silent cinema have written extensively about the tension generated by the story's contrast of traditional shtetl life with the protagonist's apotheosis as an assimilated Jewish theater star in mid-19th century Vienna. What is unquestionably new is just how much our appreciation of both the story and the film's visual artistry have increased following the brand new restoration by Berlin's Deutsche Kinemathek, which began with the discovery of the original title cards. Once these were found, a call was made for all surviving material, which turned up a number of nitrate prints throughout the world that were not only longer than the previous restoration but followed the original edit and were also tinted and toned.

Curiously, writers on the film largely fall into two camps: those like Eisner who practically ignore the storyline and focus on the aesthetics, celebrating the way director E.A. Dupont and cinematographer Theodor Sparkuhl seem to emulate the light and shadow of a Rembrandt etching, and those who bypass the palpable beauty to analyze what the film is saying about the clash between demonstrable Yiddishkeit and the quality of "passing." It's a shame that so few scholars bring both perspectives together. Hiding from the film's fascinating treatment of Jewish life misses a key reason why *The Ancient*

*Law* is so special, while sidelining the aesthetics to address only the storyline relegates the movie to that ghettoized subsection called "Jewish films."

The opening is set in a shtetl in Galicia, where Baruch Meyer (Ernst Deutsch) develops the acting bug after impersonating Ahasuerus in a Purim play, much to the fury of his father the Rabbi (Abraham Morewski, looking far older than his thirty-seven years). Encouraged by itinerant salesman Ruben Pick (Robert Garrison), Baruch leaves the community and takes up with a small theater troupe, tucking his long *peyes* (side-locks) under a cap and capturing the eye of Archduchess Elisabeth Theresia (Henny Porten) during a performance of *Romeo and Juliet*. She arranges an audition with Heinrich Laube (Hermann Vallentin), director of Vienna's Burgtheater, and Baruch quickly climbs the ladder of stardom, cutting off his *peyes* and exchanging his shtetl clothes for the sophisticated fashions of a man-about-town. He's receptive to the archduchess's infatuation, though not nearly as passionate; shortly after she admits that her royal title makes this love match impossible, Baruch returns to his village, where his pining sweetheart Esther (Margarete Schlegel) is waiting. Back in Vienna, the newlyweds reap the benefits of his fame, hoping to convince his father of the validity of his life in the theater.

Screenwriter Paul Reno (born Pinkus Nothmann) was partly inspired by the 19th-century actor Bogumil Dawison, hired by the actual Laube at the Burgtheater in 1849. Laube held very firm notions about Jews in modern society: assimilation or expulsion, and



he refused to give Dawson major roles in classic tragedies, claiming the actor over-sentimentalized them. It was a prevailing anti-Semitic put-down, associating outward displays of emotion with Jewish traits, and unsurprisingly Reno veered significantly from the historical record when inventing his characters. However, the question of assimilation does form a major element of *The Ancient Law*, with many film historians discussing the significance of Baruch laying aside the trappings of his Jewish self in order to succeed on stage. It's important to acknowledge that Baruch doesn't discard his religious identification after changing his appearance, he simply adopts the elegant clothing of the city (in Vienna, one thinks of the Ephrussi and the Wertheimers), challenging his father's idea of what it is to be a Jew without losing his faith.

Refreshingly, *The Ancient Law* presents the shtetl as a traditional rural village, not an impoverished and foul-looking place of misery. In 1930, pioneering theorist Harry A. Potamkin praised the film for its refusal to schmaltz up (my words) the overtly Orthodox roles, making it the opposite of *The Jazz Singer*, although that seminal movie very likely drew upon Dupont's film for its tale of a cantor's son wanting to be a performer. For German audiences of the day, the enormous popularity of Henny Porten would have transcended any hesitations over the theme, though unlike her real-life story (in 1921 she married the Jewish doctor Wilhelm von Kaufmann), the characters refuse to wed outside the faith. Does the archduchess accept that a romance with Baruch is impossible because he's Jewish, or because he's a commoner, and an actor to boot? The movie gives signs that origin and profession are the key (once he's ditched the *peyes*), though perhaps that's because the religious barrier is too obvious to need addressing directly. Precisely because the status of urban German and Austrian middle-class Jews solidified in the 1920s, the backlash against integration and fears of assimilation continued to grow. Just days after the film's premiere in late

October 1923, anti-Semitic riots broke out in Berlin, specifically directed at the kinds of East European Jews represented by Baruch's family.

While troubling clouds were developing over Europe, America was hardly free of its own homegrown anti-Semitism. Three years after the film's release, the American magazine *Motion Picture Classic* ran a two-page profile of Dupont, giving the Jewish director Huguenot ancestry (the Gentile-ization of Hollywood performers was standard practice by then). Today, Dupont is best known as the director of *Variety* (1925), a spectacular film that's maintained his status as one of the silent era's more dynamic figures. He'd been working steadily as a director since 1918, but it wasn't until his first pairing with Porten in the mountain-film *Die Geier-Wally* (1921) that his reputation began to take off. With *The Ancient Law*, Dupont's attention to pictorial beauty as well as his facility with actors garnered accolades that made him one of the most highly praised European filmmakers until his ill-fated career in the sound era. The film has numerous striking moments worth singling out: the emotionally rich vignette of Baruch dreamily clutching Ahasuerus' crown as he imagines a life in the theater; the potent long shot of Ruben Pick leaving the shtetl, his solitary figure enveloped by dust rolling in across the fields; the painterly beauty when the archduchess, realizing Baruch's ambition is greater than his attachment to her, opens her sitting room window and basks in the sunlight.

Glowing critiques followed worldwide distribution, including in the U.S., though in her influential 1926 book *Let's Go to the Movies*, Iris Barry calls it a "beautiful, unsuccessful film" (I haven't found box-office figures and don't know if the lack of success was due to sparse audiences or half-hearted distribution). She was especially taken by Deutsch, whom she compares to Charlie Chaplin and, indeed, his sensitive performance balances intelligence with humor. Like many in the cast and crew, Deutsch left Germany as anti-Semitism made life increasingly



difficult. He ultimately returned to Berlin after World War II and is best remembered now as Baron Kurtz in *The Third Man* (1949). Abraham Morewski, one of the Yiddish theater's true stars, also survived by fleeing to the Soviet Central Asian republics, making his way back to Latvia and ending his days as a star in Warsaw with Ida Kaminska's State Jewish Theater. Others in the production weren't so lucky: Paul Reno was murdered in Bergen-Belsen and Grete Berger, playing the rabbi's wife, died in Auschwitz. Contrary to a number of sources, Werner Krauss is not in the cast.

— Jay Weissberg





# FRAGMENT OF AN EMPIRE

LIVE MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT BY STEPHEN HORNE  
AND FRANK BOCKIUS

**DIRECTED BY FRIDRIKH ERMILER, USSR, 1929**

**CAST** Fiodor Nikitin, Yakov Gudkin, Liudmila Semionova, and Valerii Solovtsov **PRODUCTION** Sovkino

**PRINT SOURCE** SFSFF Collection

“Fridrikh Ermler was one of the greatest masters in the history of Soviet and world cinema,” writes film scholar Peter Bagrov. “This was acknowledged by such filmmakers as Eisenstein, Chaplin, and Pabst ... Why he is unknown in the West is a mystery.” In her 1992 book *Movies for the Masses*, Denise J. Youngblood concurs: “If influence is the criterion for determining the significance of a film director, then Fridrikh Ermler is perhaps the most important director in Soviet film history.”

*Fragment of an Empire*, Ermler’s last silent feature, which Youngblood considers “the most important film in Soviet silent cinema” is little known and woefully underappreciated today. That paragon of Soviet film scholarship Jay Leyda called it “a model of realism, presented without any sophistication, almost as if Ermler were telling a parable, though its technique recalls both Eisenstein and Dovzhenko.”

The story concerns a young man, Filimonov, drafted into the tsar’s army during World War I, who becomes a total amnesiac due to shell shock. He begins to regain his memory a few years later and is at pains to understand what happened as his country has been thoroughly transformed by the Bolshevik Revolution of October 1917.

A gentle soul, Filimonov appears to be a simpleton at first. The film opens on a grim scene of bodies piled up at a rural railroad station during the Civil War between the Red Army and the Whites, who were trying to restore the old regime. Filimonov, completely unaware of the surrounding circumstances, does a kindness to a helpless Red soldier.

The otherwise placid Filimonov is haunted by a woman’s face, a medal in the shape of a cross, and other things he sees that seem familiar but cannot understand why. When the Civil War is over, his curiosity leads him to undertake a trip to Petrograd (whose name has been changed to Leningrad), his hometown. Upon arriving he recognizes the famous Narva Arch but is puzzled by a statue of Lenin, the new avant-garde buildings, women wearing short skirts.

Filimonov tries to find a job at his old workplace, but the old boss no longer runs the factory. It is run by a factory committee and is now a workers collective. Little by little, as Filimonov learns that society is run by the workers and peasants, he begins to appreciate what has happened. He becomes an accepted member of the workforce and slowly becomes aware of what it means for the workers (like himself) and peasants to be in charge.

But even as he fills in the missing pieces of the puzzle, he still longs to find his wife Natasha. Sympathetic coworkers do a little research and find out who she is and send him to her address. He is dismayed to find that she is now remarried. Her new husband is an officious party hack who lectures workers on women’s rights but treats his own wife like an inferior servant. Natasha’s new husband is an archetype of the rising Soviet apparatchik who has lots of books by Lenin on the shelf, but nothing in common politically or temperamentally with the original Bolshevik revolutionaries. Natasha, even though she is a victim of her husband’s sexist attitudes, is too weak to





Fiodor Nikitin

stand up for herself and leave him. Filimonov sees the two of them as “fragments” of the old society.

Ermler himself was drafted into the army in 1916 at the age of eighteen to fight for the tsar in World War I. Born Vladimir Breslav into a struggling Jewish family in Latvia, he had no formal education. However, his ability to speak German made him useful as a spy for the tsarist army under the name Fridrikh Ermler. After WWI, Ermler enthusiastically joined the Bolsheviks and was assigned to the Cheka, the secret police created to fight the counterrevolution. Throughout his life Ermler was known as a highly political and committed Communist Party member.

When the Whites were finally vanquished, Ermler tried to fulfill a youthful dream to become an actor but soon decided he had no acting talent and aimed instead to become a director. After a brief stint at the Leningrad Institute of Screen Arts with its old-school teachers and ideology, Ermler founded a new film school, the Cinema Experimental Workshop

(KEM), with the aim of revolutionizing the entire profession. Here with KEM’s slogans “No feelings!” “No transformations!” “Down with Stanislavsky! “Long live Meyerhold!” he led the way to what he believed to be a “proletarian” approach to cinema. “A film worker should be like a cabinetmaker,” he pronounced. Cinema to him was a craft not an art. That would be too pretentious. He made films from the point of view of a political activist.

With his third film, *Katka the Apple Seller* (1926), Ermler’s career began to take off. This story of a young peasant woman who leaves her native village to work in the big city of Leningrad where she falls in with a bad crowd was the first collaboration between Ermler and the actor Fiodor Nikitin, who plays the lead role of Filimonov in *Fragment*.

It was with 1927’s *The Parisian Cobbler* that Ermler was able to find an effective vehicle for his concept that films should deal with the problems of contemporary Soviet society, films that were not merely

## “FROM DEATH TO EMPTINESS, FROM EMPTINESS TO PERPLEXITY...”

empty glorifications of everything Soviet, but rather films that had both Soviet villains as well as Soviet heroes, films to confront Soviet problems. This genre became known as the *bytovoi* film, and *Parisian Cobbler* was the first. The *bytovoi*, or “slice of life,” film period lasted until 1934, on the verge of Stalin’s Great Purge when it became dangerous to identify any Soviet “villains” or “problems.” Those categories could change from day to day, and a single misstep could result in being declared an enemy of the state, followed by banishment or even death.

The newcomer Ermler learned his craft quickly. The work of the untutored young man soon became profound, nuanced, and layered. “From a psychological point of view,” the British documentarian and film historian Paul Rotha wrote about *Fragment of an Empire* in 1930, “the direction of Ermler was amazing. The subconscious process of the man’s [Filimonov] mind, particularly in the return of his memory through an association of latent ideas, was portrayed with an extraordinary power. From death to emptiness, from emptiness to perplexity, from perplexity to understanding, the changing mental states were subtly revealed.”

Ermler’s partner in *Fragment*, of course, was the actor who portrayed Filimonov, Fiodor Nikitin. The collaboration of those two should have been impossible; they were like oil and water. Nikitin was from an aristocratic background with an excellent education—and a confirmed admirer of Stanislavsky’s Method. To prepare for his part as Filimonov, Nikitin disguised himself as a doctor’s assistant in the Forel Psychiatric Clinic, where he studied amnesia patients. Ermler was a believer in Vsevolod Meyerhold’s more external approach to performance and enjoyed goading his lead actor on

set. Yet whatever the tools used Ermler saw that he was getting a great performer in Nikitin. In all, they made four films together. By the end of shooting *Fragment*, however, the two could no longer tolerate each other and never worked together again.

Nonetheless, in his memoirs published in 1970, a few years after the director’s death, Nikitin spoke admiringly of the man who had vexed him so much. “I am happy that for three years I was Fridrikh Ermler’s comrade-in-arms,” he recalled. “The semiliterate druggist’s boy from Rezekne, next a soldier for the Revolution, the producer of the most talented cinematic chronicles of the party, a director of worldwide fame—surely one hears in this fairy-tale biography the mighty wind of October.”

— Miguel Pendás

### SFSFF RESTORATION

Based primarily on a 35mm print held at EYE Film-museum in Amsterdam, this restoration of *Fragment of an Empire* is supplemented with a 35mm nitrate print from the Swiss Cinémathèque, which provided the original Russian intertitles for Acts 2–6 as well as a small number of shots missing from the primary source. Titles absent from the Swiss print have been reproduced based on Russian censor records and are identified with the notation “2018” in the lower right corner. A partnership between EYE Filmmuseum, Gosfilmofond of Russia, and the San Francisco Silent Film Festival, the restoration also received funding from Rick Andersen and John and Susan Sinnott. It would not have been possible without the perseverance and meticulous scholarship of archivist Peter Bagrov.

— Robert Byrne





# BATTLING BUTLER

LIVE MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT BY THE MONT ALTO  
MOTION PICTURE ORCHESTRA

**DIRECTED BY BUSTER KEATON, USA, 1926**

**CAST** Buster Keaton, Sally O'Neil, Snitz Edwards, and Francis MacDonald **PRODUCTION** Buster Keaton Productions **PRINT SOURCE** Cohen Film Collection

Sooner or later, nearly all silent clowns found themselves in the ring: looking pitiful in boxing shorts, making a mockery of the Marquess of Queensbury. Buster Keaton, who liked to say that he'd been "brought up being knocked down" in his family's roughhouse vaudeville act, took the fight game more seriously in his seventh feature film, *Battling Butler* (1926). But then, seriousness was his comic trademark. He learned as a child that if he grinned to show audiences he wasn't hurt after being hurled across the stage, they didn't laugh; if he maintained a solemn, unruffled deadpan, they went to pieces.

He saw a good property for himself in *Battling Butler*, a musical comedy starring Charlie Ruggles that had run for 313 performances on Broadway in 1923–24. There were rich possibilities for physical comedy in the premise of a wealthy milquetoast who is forced, through a series of far-fetched coincidences and misunderstandings, to train as a boxer. The story also lent itself well to the arc Keaton followed in most of his features: that of a sheltered, hapless young man who, spurred by love and other extremities, finds his own ingenuity and grit.

This arc requires Keaton to convincingly play an effete, incompetent wimp, quite a stretch given his knockabout upbringing, mechanical genius, and surpassing athleticism. He first revealed this gift when he was cast wildly against type as Bertie "the Lamb" Van Alstyne in Herbert Blaché and Winchell Smith's *The Saphead* (1920), a film version of a wheezy stage farce. In 1920, on the brink of his debut as a solo star-director, no audience had seen Keaton

in anything but baggy pants and slapshoes, taking pratfalls and sacks of flour in the face. Yet the role of a pampered scion fit him like a kid glove. A slight lift of the eyebrows and droop of the eyelids turned his chiseled face into a mask of exquisite hauteur, and his acrobatic body could assume the repose of total passivity. Silver-spoon roles suited his innate elegance and restraint, the innocence and pure-hearted gallantry that he projected on screen. He was, as a perceptive *New York Times* review of *The Saphead* put it, a "gentleman of comedy."

He recycled this character in several of his own films, most directly as the peerless twit Rollo Treadway in *The Navigator* (1924). As Alfred Butler, he is introduced lounging in evening clothes, being fussed over by a footman, his valet, and his doting mother. No human being could look more docile, more helpless; a life muffled in swansdown has rendered him virtually comatose. Yet there is nothing mean-spirited or even condescending in Keaton's caricatures of wealthy idlers: they bring out his delicacy and sweetness, as well as his sharp but bemused eye for absurdity. Packed off by his father on a camping trip intended to toughen him up, Alfred sleeps in a vast tent furnished with a brass bed, Chinese screen, and polar-bear rug; his valet draws his bath, lays out his clothes, irons his newspaper, and serves his meals in silver dishes.

As Martin, Alfred's pint-sized Jeeves, Keaton cast Snitz Edwards, a Budapest-born Jewish character actor who also appears in *Seven Chances* and *College*, and here becomes a full-fledged comedy partner. A tiny man with the face of a lovable gargoyle,





Edwards matches Keaton's sedate pace and refinement in these scenes, which are filled with gentle humor as Alfred, modeling a series of high-fashion sporting ensembles, demonstrates his serene ineptitude at hunting and fishing. Submerged up to his neck after capsizing his boat, he politely lifts his hat to a passing "Mountain Girl" and invites her to dinner. Sally O'Neil, an adorably petite brunette, was only eighteen when Keaton borrowed her from MGM to play his leading lady but she had already costarred with Constance Bennett and Joan Crawford in *Sally, Irene and Mary* (1925). A former vaudevillian under the name "Chotsie Noonan," she enjoyed a brief stardom, usually as a feisty Irish lass, but left Hollywood not long after starring in John Ford's *The Brat* (1931). After a meet-cute in which the Mountain Girl assails Alfred with rocks and invective, their romance is swift and sweet. Her redwood-size menfolk are more skeptical—until they are told their prospective in-law is Alfred "Battling" Butler, contender for the lightweight world's championship.

It is through this imposture, and the nastiness of the real boxer, that poor Alfred finds himself in the ring, training for a big fight. He is meant to look puny and defenseless, but once he strips down to shorts

there's no hiding how fit and muscular Keaton really was. Despite his sculpted body, he plays the early training scenes so realistically that they're at times more painful than funny to watch. He reacts the way any normal, soft-bellied person would to being mercilessly pummeled—it's easy to forget that he was not a normal, soft-bellied person at all. Buster brought in a friend, welterweight champ Mickey Walker, to consult on the fight scenes, and put his own Euclidian mind to the task of exploring every possible way to get entangled in the ropes.

The source play lets the title character off the hook without having to face the big fight, but Keaton felt this was

dramatically unsatisfying—that you couldn't give the audience a big buildup with no payoff—so he added a scene in which the sadistic boxer attacks his namesake in the dressing room. Pushed too far, humiliated too deeply, the meek millionaire finally reacts with violent fury. Some Keaton fans dislike this climactic, entirely non-comic fight, feeling the savagery is out of character. It is extremely rare for Buster to show such anger on screen or to dish out the kind of punishment he regularly took, but he was by all accounts pleased with the strong dramatic finish. In real life, Keaton paid a high price for his refusal of confrontation, his tendency to bury his feelings and withdraw into passivity. Perhaps he enjoyed playing a character who lets go and fights back.

Keaton's physical courage and stoicism were legendary and nearly pathological—he endured numerous injuries and often risked his life while making his films—but on screen he breaks the cartoon rules of slapstick to reveal pain and exhaustion. His underlying seriousness and clear-eyed realism are the ballast to his flights of comic imagination; beneath his celebrated deadpan, his feelings run all the deeper for being held in reserve. Those writers who have,

bizarrely, claimed that Keaton's characters express no emotion and elicit no sympathy must never have watched his films with an audience and heard the cheers, wincing gasps, and "awws" interspersed with the laughs.

*Battling Butler* was one of Keaton's biggest box office hits. He always recalled it fondly, but it is not a favorite of many fans today and has become one of his least-seen efforts. Coming in between the charmingly offbeat *Go West* (1925) and his sublime masterpiece *The General* (1927), it has little of the otherworldliness or the fantastical set-pieces that were his trademark. Though comparatively prosaic, *Battling Butler* displays Keaton's maturity and deftness as a director (and editor—he cut all his own films), with occasional flourishes like the tender shot in which Sally O'Neil's face is framed in the rear window of the car as Alfred drives away, which rhymes with a later shot of her framed in the crook of a boxing coach's arm. Visual storytelling came naturally to Keaton, both as an actor and as a filmmaker; action was his native tongue. He speaks

with his body, his face, and his camera; few artists have ever had less need of words.

His qualities as a performer were exactly the same as those of his movies: the same reticence and precision, the same unadorned, functional beauty. His uniquely understated style made him one of nature's aristocrats, but it didn't come from any effort to be "classy." He simply knew what was right, and had the confidence to let it stand without fuss or fanfare. That he was also very funny can seem like the icing on the cake, but it is not: his ability to see humor in frustrations and failures was his greatest gift—and ours.

— Imogen Sara Smith





"I have lived for many years on the outskirts of show business with an occasional trip into town."



## Remembering Frank Buxton

by Leonard Maltin

The San Francisco Silent Film Festival has lost one of its greatest friends and biggest boosters. Frank Buxton was not only a generous sponsor of this event, along with his wife, Cynthia Sears; he was an enthusiastic attendee who encouraged friends and family to join him at the Castro Theatre every year.

Audience members who saw him introduce screenings over the years may not have realized the pedigree of that genial fellow onstage. My family and I feel blessed to have known him. He was a naturally funny guy who was inordinately proud of his ability to screw his face into a perfect replica of Edgar Bergen's dummy Mortimer Snerd. How can you not love a man like that?

He was canny enough to throw himself an elaborate eightieth birthday party seven years ago. Friends and family came from far and wide to

spend a weekend in his company, sing his praises, and (not so incidentally) screen a Buster Keaton movie. Frank was justly proud of the fact that as a young actor he had shared a stage with Keaton in a summer-stock production of *Three Men on a Horse*.

He went on to enjoy a formidable career in show business on both sides of the camera. Baby boomers may remember him as the host of the ABC-TV series *Discovery* in the 1960s. A clean-cut, all-American type, he and cohost Virginia Gibson (one of the brides in *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers*) were the perfect kid-friendly grownups to introduce young viewers to the wonders of science, travel, and the world at large.

He then created *Hot Dog*, a memorable weekend TV show that illustrated how everyday objects were made, from baseball bats to ... hot dogs.

Having worked as a stand-up comic, Frank had good relationships with other comedic talents and put them on camera to riff about the subjects at hand: Woody Allen, Jonathan Winters, and Joanne Worley. This landmark show earned a prestigious Peabody Award.

Woody Allen used Frank as a straight-man interviewer in his memorable trailer for *Bananas* and then hired him to provide voices for his hilarious spy spoof *What's Up, Tiger Lily?* A cheesy Japanese imitation of James Bond films was transformed, through artful English-language dubbing, into the search for a coveted egg-salad recipe. Frank also put his vocal talents to work on the TV cartoon series *Batfink* (and, much later, *Garfield and Friends*).

He was one of the founders of Sons of the Desert, the international Laurel and Hardy organization. (That's how I met him, when I was fourteen years old.) He had a lifelong interest in old-time radio, which led him and his *Discovery* colleague Bill Owen to write two books, *Radio's Golden Age* and *The Big Broadcast*. He appeared on *The Tonight Show* and staged a re-creation of the Superman radio program (featuring its original leading man, Bud Collyer) with the enthusiastic participation of Johnny Carson, who also grew up on radio. You can see some of Frank's appearances on his YouTube channel.

When I was newly married I introduced my wife Alice to Frank on our first trip to Los Angeles, his adopted home. She liked him immediately but observed his bachelor ways and was sure he'd never settle down. That was before he met Cynthia and became the most devoted of husbands, and a pretty swell father to boot.

His career came full circle when he was hired by Garry Marshall as a staff writer on *Love, American Style*. He spent most of the 1970s working as writer and director on Marshall's TV hits *Happy Days*, *The Odd Couple*, and *Mork and Mindy*. He instituted

the tradition of screening vintage comedy films for his writing team, as reported in *TV Guide*, and took particular pleasure in directing his old friend Jonathan Winters alongside the dazzling young Robin Williams.

Marshall was loyal to friends and colleagues and, when Frank and Cynthia left L.A. to live on Bainbridge Island near Seattle, he hired Frank to fill small roles in his films *Overboard*, *Frankie and Johnny*, and *Beaches*. Frank never lost the acting bug. Let's face it: he was a ham and appeared in other film and television projects, including commercials, in later years.

Even in so-called retirement, Frank was never idle. He performed with The Edge, a Seattle improv comedy troupe, and I can testify that his timing and inventiveness were as keen as ever. He seemed as young as anyone on that stage and always made us laugh. He also programmed film series at the Bainbridge Island Museum of Art.

His last days were difficult but even in a weakened state he retained his sense of humor. Just before he lost the ability to communicate, his friends John and Ann Ellis visited him in the hospital. They brought a ukulele and serenaded him with some favorite songs. At the end of the final tune Frank closed his eyes, dropped his hand from his chest and whispered "Rosebud." He laughed at his own joke along with his friends. A lifelong performer as well as a consummate film buff, he knew how to deliver the perfect exit line.

Frank Buxton always looked on the bright side of life. We would do well to follow his example ... showing one of his favorite Buster Keaton movies makes that easy to do, at least for tonight.

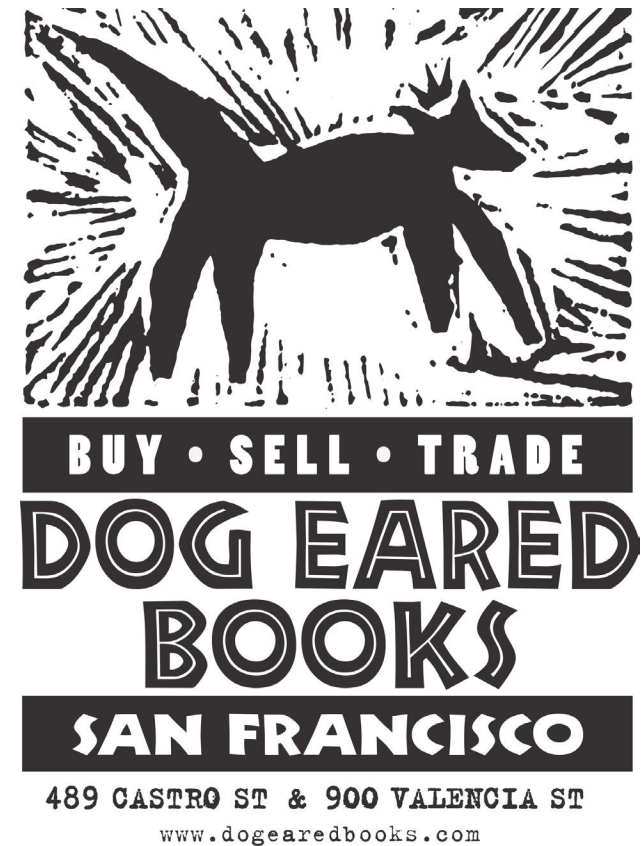


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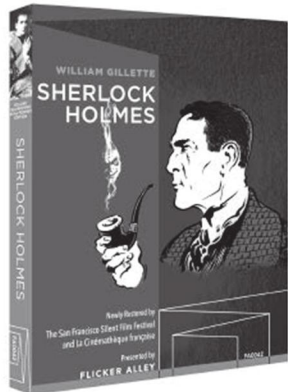
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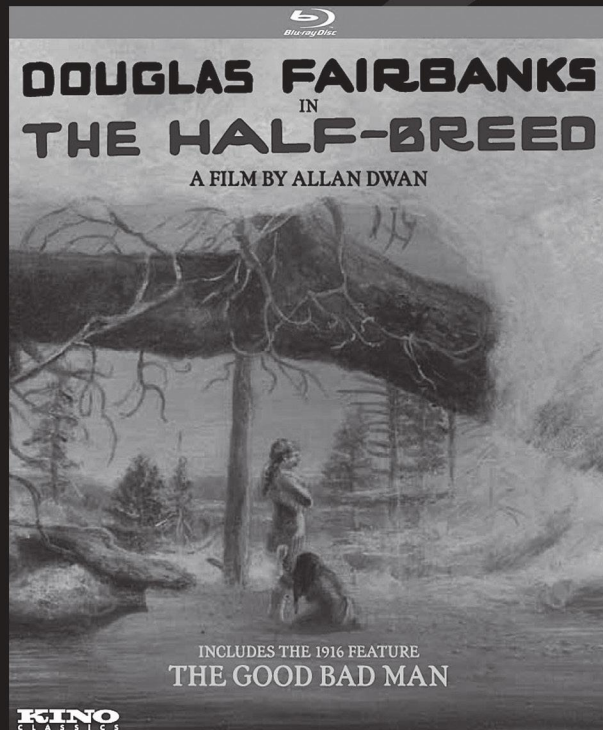


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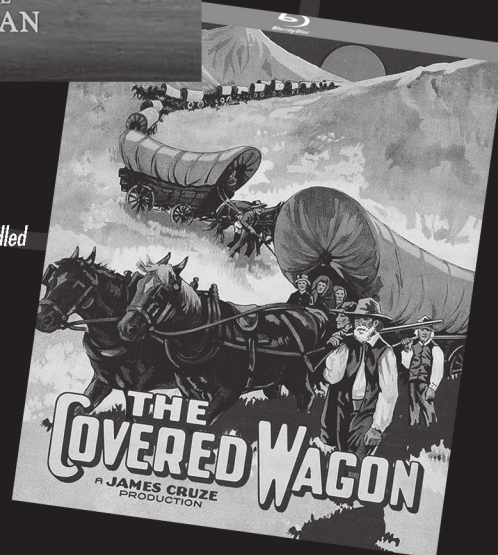
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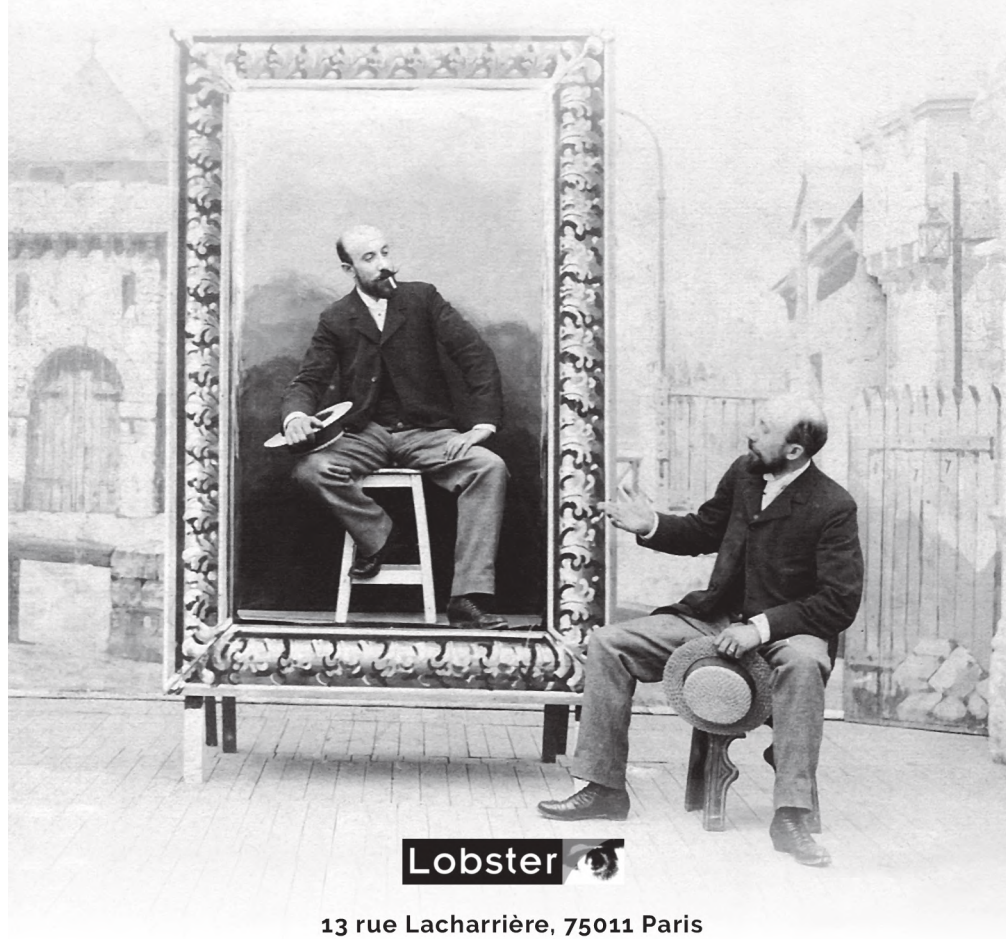
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