

A DAY OF SILENTS | DECEMBER 7, 2019 | CASTRO THEATRE

A DAY of SILENTS SCHEDULE, DECEMBER 7, 2019

11:00 AM FATTY + BUSTER Music by Donald Sosin

1:00PM REDSKIN

Music by Mont Alto Motion Picture Orchestra

3:15 PM WOMAN WITH A MOVIE CAMERA Music by Donald Sosin

5:00 PM THE MARRIAGE CIRCLE Music by Mont Alto Motion Picture Orchestra

8:00 PM THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA Music by Berklee Silent Film Orchestra

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MUSICIANS

BERKLEE SILENT FILM ORCHESTRA

Incubated at the world-renowned Berklee School of Music in Boston, Berklee Silent Film Orchestra is made up of student composers and musicians who collaborate on original scores for silent-era films under the leadership of Emmy nominee Sheldon Mirowitz. BSFO performed its scores for The Last Laugh, Varieté, The Freshman, and The Man Who Laughs at past SFSFF events and makes its first appearance at A Day of Silents to accompany The Phantom of the Opera.

MONT ALTO MOTION PICTURE ORCHESTRA

A chamber ensemble that revives the tradition of silent-film orchestras, Mont Alto Motion Picture Orchestra has recorded and toured widely, creating vibrant, emotional, and historically appropriate scores for more than 125 films. Consisting of musicians Rodney Sauer, Britt Swenson, David Short, Brian Collins, and Dawn Kramer, the ensemble appears twice to accompany Redskin and The Marriage Circle, combining as always precision playing with expert musical selections to bring these silent-era films to life.

DONALD SOSIN

For close to half a century pianist Donald Sosin has been creating and performing silent-film music, both live and for 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 at major festivals worldwide, on Turner Classic Movies, and on more than sixty DVD releases. He plays for both the Fatty + Buster and the Alice Guy Blaché programs.



FATTY + BUSTER THE COMIQUE WORLD OF FATTY ARBUCKLE AND BUSTER KEATON

LIVE MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT BY DONALD SOSIN

GOOD NIGHT, NURSE (1918), **THE COOK** (1918), and **THE GARAGE** (1919)

DIRECTED BY and starring ROSCOE "FATTY" ARBUCKLE with featured player BUSTER KEATON PRINT SOURCE Lobster Films

ne of the most consequential chance meetings in cinema history occurred on a rainy day in March 1917 in New York City. Or so goes the story Buster Keaton often told about walking down Broadway and bumping into an old friend, Lou Anger, who introduced his companion, Roscoe "Fatty" Arbuckle. A silent film comedian then at the peak of his popularity, Arbuckle invited Keaton, a twenty-one-year-old vaudeville veteran who had never set foot in a movie studio, to come by and do a scene in his latest two-reeler, The Butcher Boy. The thirty-year-old Arbuckle had recently been enticed away from Mack Sennett's Keystone Studio by producer Joseph Schenck, who offered him his own independent company. Keaton was at a turning point, too, having recently left his family's knockabout comedy act, The Three Keatons—fed up with the act's declining fortunes and his father's increasingly heavy drinking—and gotten his first solo gig in a prestigious stage revue, The Passing Show of 1917. But everything changed when he stepped in front of the camera—a moment we can still watch, since, as Keaton loved to boast, his first scene in The Butcher Boy was done in a single take. Arbuckle, impressed with his comic inventiveness and peerless gifts as a punching bag, promptly offered him a job. Keaton tore up his lucrative theater contract and never looked back.

Whether Keaton's Broadway encounter really was serendipitous (or whether, as some scholars have suggested, he was intentionally recruited), he was

instantly smitten with filmmaking. Fascinated by the camera, he tore apart Arbuckle's Bell and Howell and reassembled it, not satisfied until he understood how every last gear, sprocket, and shutter worked. Movies clicked with Keaton's visual and mechanical genius and suited his innate perfectionism.

In the informal, rough-and-tumble freedom of Arbuckle's Comique Film Corporation (called "Cumeeky" by its members), Keaton became a performer, gag writer, stunt man, and assistant director. "I just watched Arbuckle do it," was his account of how he learned to make films. A deft and often elegant director, Arbuckle liked expansive backgrounds and self-referential jokes about cinema. He was also extraordinarily generous and ego-less, readily ceding space to his talented protégé. Over the course of their fourteen short comedies together, Keaton vaulted from third banana to equal partner, and the films themselves evolved from frenetic, Keystone-style anarchy to the cohesive plots, unhurried pacing, and elaborate, precisely-executed gags that became Keaton's trademarks.

Arbuckle once said that Keaton "lived in the camera," an insight that shows the deep understanding at the heart of their friendship. Roscoe and Buster were both gentle souls who loved practical jokes and making people laugh. They shared a birthplace (Kansas), a history as child performers, and difficult relationships with their fathers. Both emerged from vaudeville, the primordial soup of twentieth-century

entertainment. A tough school in which survival depended on reliably making a hit with audiences, vaudeville honed its graduates into an invincible army of dancers, singers, actors, and comedians who went forth to conquer movies, radio, and television. Vaudeville, and its shameful cousin minstrelsy, also spawned a brand of humor that was surreal, absurdist, mined with irreverent spoofs and wild free-association, carried by the personalities and supercharged energy of the performers.

You can see this style at peak zaniness in Arbuckle-Keaton shorts like and The Cook and Good Night, Nurse (both 1918). Considered lost until a print was discovered in the attic of a Norwegian hospital in 1998, The Cook illustrates Arbuckle's usual formula: pick a setting (here, a restaurant) and milk it for all the gags it is worth; once they are exhausted, move to a different setting (here, a seaside amusement park) and start over. There is little if any concern

for plot or character definition; Arbuckle can range within the same film from childlike innocence to sly, amoral naughtiness. His signature on screen is the startling contrast between his huge bulk and his nimbleness and dexterity, which he demonstrates in his role as the titular cook, casually juggling knives and flapjacks. (Off screen he hated to be called "Fatty," and Buster said his friend's avoirdupois was mostly muscle. Louise Brooks compared dancing with Roscoe to "floating in the arms of a huge doughnut.") The Cook's high point comes when Roscoe and Busterthe latter playing a flirtatious waiter—are infected by an "Egyptian" dance craze, burlesquing what was already a burlesque (via Little Egypt and other midway "hoochie-coochie" performers) of belly dance. Roscoe dons a colander headdress and saucepan bra and proceeds to conflate Salome (with a head of cabbage) and Cleopatra (with a string of frankfurters as the asp). Keaton, who was drafted into the army after making The Cook, spent much of his World War

> I career performing a similar act for officers in France as "Princess Rajah," dressed in a mess kit.

The Comique films resemble live-action cartoons, and the players—especially Keaton and Al St. John-fling their bodies around with such rubbery abandon that they look more like Looney Tunes than anything flesh and blood. St. John, who was Arbuckle's cousin, played the troupe's heavy (ironically, a skinny one), who typically incites a melee and winds up being chased off by Luke, Arbuckle's indefatigable, ladder-climbing bull terrier. Even leading ladies get in on the action—especially the vivacious, free-spirited

comedienne Alice Lake, who plays a charming lunatic in Good Night, Nurse. Now and then the mayhem lets up long enough to allow for a bit of subtle underplaying, or a close-up that reveals how shockingly good-looking the youthful Keaton was. Those eyes, those cheekbones, that profile! To throw a sack of flour at this face (as Arbuckle did in The Butcher Boy) is like

himself this way, and in these films he is game for anything, appearing as a woman with an umbrella in the opening scene of Good Night, Nurse and turning up later in the same film as a doctor in a bloody smock wielding a giant machete. One of the wackiest, most delightful, and delirious of the Comique films, Good Night, Nurse opens with Roscoe pleasantly soused on a rainy evening and ends with him sprinting in his scanties down a road littered with fainting fat men. In between, there is a blizzard-like pillow fight to rival the one in Jean Vigo's Zero de Conduite, an avant-garde operating-table point-ofview shot, and a bit where Keaton and Arbuckle, the latter in drag as a hefty nurse, start flirting and regress into an outrageous pantomime of cutesy-poo baby talk.

For Keaton fans, seeing Buster smile and laugh and mug in these shorts feels disconcerting, even vaguely taboo. But his joy is palpably genuine. Watching these guys horse around together, you can see how much fun they are having and how much they love each other. As soon as he started making his own independent films in 1920, Keaton imposed a far stricter artistic vision and unveiled his radical brand of serious comedy. In the last short he made with Arbuckle, The Garage (1919), many of the gags have his fingerprints all over them: the spontaneously



Both men suffered devastating falls from grace— Arbuckle in 1921, when he was accused of raping and causing the death of Virginia Rappe and subsequently shunned by Hollywood (despite his acquittal, after two mistrials, by a unanimous jury that issued him an apology); Keaton at the end of the 1920s when he lost control of his career at MGM and took to drink, putting skids on his personal and professional downslide. Knowing what lies ahead makes it precious to watch them romp through a primeval Eden, untroubled by rules or rationality, untouched by fatigue. They are young and free, and so are the movies, learning through play the way children do.

- IMOGEN SARA SMITH





What Arbuckle Says 。。。

make up my own plays. I don't write them. I make them up as I go along. By the time I'm through I have about 15,000 feet of film-and all I need is 2,000 feet. I've got to skim the cream off that milk."

"I don't believe you can put a story over to an audience unless you have succeeded in first getting their complete sympathy. They must be quick to rejoice in your good fortune, and as quick to shed tears at your mishaps."

"The same plot can be done over and over again in the so-called features but the comedy without new gags is a failure. That's why most comedy directors, after a while in the business, go around talking to themselves instead of giving out interviews."

"My first role was a 'fat part!' Salary? Fifty cents. When I asked for the job they told me to go home and get my shoes and stockings but I knew my mother wouldn't let me come back. So they blacked my legs and feet, too. I knew I'd get a licking when I got home. From then till 1913 I was on the stage. I did everything from singing illustrated songs to clown and acrobatic acts. I was considered 'fair,' like the rest of them."

"I was in dramatic, and principally musical, stock most of the time. My first real professional engagement was in 1904, singing illustrated songs for Sid Grauman at the Unique theater, San Jose, at \$17.50 a week. I played character stuff in Morosco's Burbank stock company here, and went all through China and Japan with Ferris Hartman in musical comedy. I played the Mikado, and Koko, and Katish—a female of the species."

66 got my first movie job at \$40 a week with Keystone. For a month I walked around out there without working. Every time I turned around, Sennett was looking at me. To this day I guess he doesn't think I'm funny. I played mostly policemen in the two or three hundred pictures I was in at Keystone, but I played everything from cops to GRAND DAMES. Mabel Normand and Ford Sterling were there, and Sennett and Henry Lehrman were the directors. All my mechanical knowledge of pictures I learned under the direction of Lehrman."

"How did I become a star? I don't know how it happened. It just happened. When I look at my old pictures I can't tell how it happened!"

"I'VE NEVER USED MY WEIGHT TO GET A LAUGH YET! You never saw me stuck in a doorway or stuck in a chair. Of course, the audience remarks about the agility on account of the weight."

"I'd a heap rather make people laugh than make 'em cry, It's a darned sight harder to do. Sometimes I think I've picked out the worst job in sight. If you don't believe me, try to be funny for thirty solid minutes yourself. After that you'll want to be a villain or a vampire just by way of a little relaxation."

ou only star in movies from picture to picture. If two or three pictures are bad, you're not a star any more. It's a constant worry. That's why movie people are temperamental. It's a

"I have all the money I want and at the conclusion of my present contract, I will stop making

pictures myself. While I am east, I am having 'Buster' Keaton make a picture on his own. Let 'em all have a chance. I don't want to be hoggish."

"In the subdued light of the movies you can be by yourself. There is nobody paying attention to you whatsoever. Even if they could see you in the darkened auditorium, they wouldn't look at you for fear of missing a scene. And when you laugh you laugh wholeheartedly and do not give a hang about the fellow across the aisle. And if your tear ducts are tapped by a bit of pathos you don't have to hide your face behind a program and furtively wipe your eyes ... The chances are the lady in the adjoining seat is weeping to her heart's content, but you can't see and you don't care. After all, it is merely another triumph for the democracy of the screen over the autocracy of the stage."

Excerpted from stories that appeared 1917-1919 in the New York Sun, Picture-Play, Photoplay, the Los Angeles Herald, Variety, and Motion Picture News.





REDSKIN

LIVE MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT BY MONT ALTO MOTION PICTURE ORCHESTRA

DIRECTED BY VICTOR SCHERTZINGER, USA, 1929

CAST Richard Dix, Julie Carter (as Gladys Belmont), Tully Marshall, George Regas (as Rigas), Noble Johnson, Augustina Lopez, and Bernard Siegel **PRODUCTION** Paramount Famous Lasky Corp. **PRINT SOURCE** Library of Congress

ne of Paramount's last silent films, released in February 1929, is this spectacularly photographed tale of a Navajo caught between two cultures. By the late 1920s, debate about the relationship of Native Americans to the dominant society was reaching a turning point, as reflected in a nine-hundred-page Interior Department report, published in 1929 as "The Problem of Indian Administration," as well as in the Pulitzer Prize-winning novel that year, Oliver La Farge's Laughing Boy, another story of the troubled effects of civilization on a Navajo.

Government policy since the end of the Indian Wars in the 1880s had been unwaveringly in support of "amalgamation" of Native Americans into mainstream white society, alongside "allotment" of tribal lands to individual Indians, a policy that culminated in the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924. But after the horrors of World War I-in which some seventeen thousand American Indians fought—a contrary view was also rising in which European civilization had evident limits and tribal groupings had values worth preserving, if under a modern corporate governance model. "The Problem of Indian Administration" acknowledged an idea previously heretical in government reports: that some Indians did not wish to integrate into white society but instead sought to "preserve what they have inherited from their fathers." New possibilities for saving tribal cultures found federal support when President Hoover did what he rightly called a "thorough house-cleaning" of the Bureau of Indian Affairs in the spring of 1929, shortly after the release of

Redskin. Central to the film is the choice between "assimilation" and "separatism" that all Indians, as newly recognized U.S. citizens, faced especially in these years. In Redskin Wing Foot's education makes him rootless in two cultures.

In one immediately evident way, Redskin is the most authentic Hollywood fiction film about Native Americans. No western before or since has come close to matching its use of authentic locations. Its story, set in the present day and involving a romance between a Navajo and a Pueblo, provided an excuse to shoot in the two tribal lands, both extraordinarily difficult to reach at the time. Wing Foot lives deep in Canyon de Chelly (in Arizona)—historically the final Navajo stronghold against U.S. conquest and subsequently Navajo tribal land. (When we first see Wing Foot as a child, behind him are the spectacular twelfth century Anasazi dwellings.) Even more impressive, Wing Foot's government school girlfriend, Corn Blossom, lives on the mesa of Acoma Pueblo (in New Mexico)—probably the oldest continually inhabited community in the United States. The very isolation of Navajo and Pueblo in the 1920s allowed them to represent for white Americans a pastoral primitivism that Plains tribes could no longer convey.

For the first thousand years of Acoma's habitation, the only route up its three-hundred-foot sheer rock walls was by the hand-carved stairs seen in the film. But visitors to the pueblo today take the road carved in 1928 by Paramount for this film's heavy two-color Technicolor equipment. This process, variations of which were in use from 1917 until the introduction



of three-color Technicolor in 1932, captured light through a beam-splitting prism and two filters onto a double-length black-and-white negative. The canyons and mesas of the Southwest made an ideal location for a process that emphasized reds, browns, and greens. (The sky was another matter; blue was essentially the missing color. Some reviewers archly suggested that the title Redskin referred to the limitations of the color process.) Initially the film was planned entirely for color, but scenes in black and white were substituted to save costs. (The budget was \$400,000, and costs for the final negative, even with the partial black and white, came in at \$472,000.) The resulting presentation of the white man's world in (amber-tinted) black and white has a nice logic. It's a grimmer place.

The title *Redskin* sounds racist—and that is part of the point: It represents how our Navajo hero is seen

after entering mainstream society. ("And you sure acted white-for a Redskin" is praise at college.) The forced removal of children from tribal homes and into government boarding schools is depicted with surprising harshness considering that Paramount had to obtain permissions from the commissioner of Indian Affairs, Charles H. Burke, who famously brooked little criticism of his office. Screenwriter Elizabeth Pickett had assured him that the film "will furnish wholesome and instructive entertainment to the public, especially in regard to the attitude of the Government toward the Indians." Burke might have been surprised by the scene of Wing Foot being beaten for his refusal to salute the U.S. flag. The authenticity in locations extended to the schools: The first scenes were shot at the Chinle Indian Boarding School at the mouth of Canyon de Chelly; the brief later scene of Wing Foot and Corn Blossom at the end of their

high school years was taken at the Sherman Indian Institute in Riverside, California (a "citizen factory" that would "give the Indians a white man's chance," according to a 1911 news item).

The story line for the middle of the film was common across Hollywood silents, including such surviving ones as Red Eagle's Love Affair (1910), Strongheart (1914), and Braveheart (1925): An Indian leaves his tribe for college, where he mistakes camaraderie on the sports field for equality—until he attracts white women. In Redskin a college flapper gets a warning from a chubby undergraduate ("Say! What's the idea-getting all steamed up over an Indian?"), and Wing Foot is reminded that he is "tolerated" only for his speed on the track. Though plot is not Redskin's strong suit, the issues faced by Wing Foot—about cultural assimilation and racial identity—have not lost their currency. "My mistake was thinking I ever had a chance among you whites!" he says. "I'm going back to my people—where I belong!" Audiences could take this separatist decision as Native American pride or as a warning against integration. The film deftly shifts attention to a different ethnic conflict: Navajo versus Pueblo. Their reconciliation through Wing Foot and Corn Blossom's marriage can demonstrate "the greatest gift of heaven-tolerance!" and allow the film an upbeat close, away from its earlier critique of white attitudes, without quite repudiating it.

Redskin's director was Victor Schertzinger, who came to the job via the unusual route of concert violinist and film-score composer, but the film's guiding force was Elizabeth Pickett, who wrote the screenplay and the novel on which it was based, both originally titled Navajo. She had produced promotional films for the Red Cross after WWI and directed one-reelers about the Pueblo for the Fox Varieties series in 1926. As was typical for the time, Redskin's leads are played by non-Native Americans, with only bit players and extras acted by Navajo and Pueblo. Corn Blossom—played in the finished film by "Gladys Belmont" (Julie Carter, in her only major film role)—

was to have been played by Louise Brooks, now immortalized in G.W. Pabst's Pandora's Box (1929). (Brooks was paid for three weeks' work on Redskin but appears nowhere in the finished film; she was on the boat to Germany for Pandora's Box before the rest of the cast returned from Arizona.) Corn Blossom as a child—played endearingly by Lorraine Rivero—provides an echo of the original casting through her iconic Louise Brooks haircut. Pioneer African American film producer Noble Johnson has the thankless role of "Pueblo Jim," the rival suitor of Corn Blossom. As Wing Foot, Richard Dix returns from a role as a Navajo in *The Vanishing American* (1925), a film that claims to lament the "vanishing" of American Indians even while illustrating its social Darwinist epigraph about the "survival of the fittest." But what the rest of the country was discovering in the 1920s, especially through reports from Southwest artist colonies, was that whole cultural groups of Native Americans were surviving quite well. Especially through its location filming, Redskin celebrates the non-vanishing American and is almost the last Hollywood feature for twenty years to take a sympathetic look into Native American life.

- SCOTT SIMMON

Originally published by the National Film Preservation Foundation with its DVD box set, Treasures III: Social Issues in American Film 1900–1934.

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Julie Carter, Richard Dix, and George Regas

HISTORY OF A LOCATION:

Ages before Douglas Fairbanks scrambled up its sheers to rescue a woman in 1917's A Modern Musketeer and Richard Dix's Wing Foot left its fertile valley to attend a white man's college in 1929's Redskin, Canyon de Chelly was home to the Ancestral Puebloans who built the stone houses still tucked into its cliffs today. But Canyon de Chelly takes its name from Native Americans who came later, the Diné, or Navajo, whose "Tseyi'" translates as "rock canyon." It is one of three canyons bound by four mountains—Mt. Hesperus, Mt. Taylor, Mt. Blanca, and the San Francisco Peaks—that make up the Dinétah, the traditional Navajo homeland.

900–1300 Ancestral Puebloans, or Anasazi, build communities in the Four Corners region of what is now the U.S. Southwest. After a prolonged drought they abandon Arizona's Canyon de Chelly but remain at New Mexico's Acoma Pueblo, where *Redskin*'s Corn Blossom lives.

1540 Francisco Vázquez de Coronado reaches the Southwest. The Spanish continually raid the area now farmed by the Hopi.

1630 Descended from people who came from Alaska and Canada, the nomadic Diné have arrived and turn the canyon and its valley into their heartland. In his report to the king of Spain, Portuguese missionary Fray Alonso de Benavides writes from Santa Fe that "these Apachede Nabaju are very great farmers." The name sticks and the Diné become Navajo to outsiders.

1805 The Navajo deploy time-honored tactics to hide their families in the caves of Canyon de Chelly when a criollo colonel leads an invasion in the dead of winter. Puebloan-made handholds as well as enormous ladder poles (some remain in place today) are used to ascend the heights and then pulled up behind so enemies cannot follow. Some Spaniards succeed in reaching the hideaway and, in fighting off one soldier, a Navajo woman tumbles over the cliff taking him with her. One-hundred-fifteen Navajos are killed at what becomes known as The

Place Where Two Fell Off. Thirty-five are taken as slaves and three-hundred-fifty sheep are stolen. The colonel reports back that Chelly's fertile valley is "spacious and in it they have plenty of farmlands which are wanted by a regular river that runs through the middle." Paintings still visible on the rock faces record battles with the Spanish who are depicted on horseback.

1821 "The Navajos detect no difference," writes one historian about Mexico becoming independent of Spain with territories that include Alta California, Santa Fe de Nuevo México, and Coahuila y Texas.

1849 The Navajo welcome U.S. Colonel John MacRae Washington's men with baskets of their famous peaches when they arrive at Canyon de Chelly, part of territories wrested from Mexico the year prior. A dispute over ownership of a horse ends in bloodshed when Washington fires a cannon at Navajo warriors, killing several, including their elderly chief, Narbona. Artillerymade pockmarks still mar the rock face below the White House ruins.

1851 Canyon de Chelly warriors repel a raid by Edwin Vose Sumner, the colonel who builds Fort Defiance in the Dinétah.

1860 Frustrated by broken agreements, grazing on their lands, and theft of their sheep, chiefs Barboncito and Manuelito set out from Canyon de Chelly and nearly overrun Fort Defiance.

CANYON DE CHEI 1864 In January the Navajo secure their families with supplies on Fortress Rock as Kit Carson prepares an assault at the head of four hundred troops at the height of the U.S. campaign to remove them. To retrieve water from the reservoir without detection, the Navajo form a human chain down the steep rock face in the dead of night. Carson's men burn crops, kill livestock, and smash dwellings and many Navajo surrender rather than face starvation. The death blow comes just before the fall harvest when Captain John Thompson's men systematically destroy three thousand peach trees as well as eleven acres of corn and beans. An estimated two hundred Navajo die on the "Long Walk" to Fort Sumner and many others succumb during four years captivity at Bosque Redondo. Uncounted others were taken to New Mexico as slaves. 1868 Barboncito makes a successful plea to William Tecumseh Sherman to return the Navajo to Canyon de Chelly: "When the Navajos were first created, four mountains and four rivers were pointed out to us, inside of which we should live ... I hope to God you will not ask me to go to any other country except my own." 1924 The Indian Citizenship Act provides U.S. citizenship by birthright. However, Arizona and New Mexico (as well as other states) prevent Native Americans from voting until 1948. 1931 The U.S. Congress sets aside approximately one-hundred-thirty square miles for Canyon de Chelly National Monument within the borders of the Navajo Nation.



WOMAN WITH A MOVIE CAMERA THE FILMS OF ALICE GUY BLACHÉ

LIVE MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT BY DONALD SOSIN

hen she died in 1968 at ninety-five years old, Alice Guy Blaché believed that all but a handful of her titles were lost. In a career that began at the beginning of movies, Guy had written, produced, and/or directed about a thousand, including one hundred sound films long before talkies. After a divorce from her English husband Herbert Blaché and the shuttering of Solax, their New Jersey production facility (complete with a glass studio, film developing lab, a western town, and a lake), Guy returned to France determined to work again and began to search for her French-made films but found nothing. When she traveled back to the United States in 1927 for her American films, the fifty-four-year-old cinema pioneer came up empty-handed once again. An entire career coinciding with the medium's first decades down the historical drain pipe. To help earn a badly needed income, she wrote and taught but never made another film.

Guy's story in cinema begins with the need for a job. In order to support her widowed mother, a teenaged Guy trained on the typewriter, one of the many gadgets to emerge during the late nineteenth century's flurry of mechanical invention. At her first employer's she was what we call nowadays sexually harassed and she eventually took a better, less bothersome position at the Comptoire Général de Photographie, where the latest gadgets came in through the door almost daily. Working for Léon Gaumont, whose namesake entity still operates today, Guy encountered a Who's Who of turn-of-the-century movers and shakers, which included aviator Santos-Dumont. engineer Gustave Eiffel, and Georges Demeny with his phonoscope, an early marriage of moving image and sound.

To hawk their photographic inventions, tinkers and entrepreneurs displayed the final products their machines could produce, of the kind that Guy went to see by invitation of the Lumières in March 1895. She recalled the now legendary "demonstration films" as "brief and repetitious" and thought she could do better. "Gathering my courage," she relayed in her memoirs decades later, "I timidly proposed to Gaumont that I might write one or two little scenes and have a few friends perform in them." He agreed, as long as it didn't interfere with her regular duties. She was so successful that Gaumont set her up in a studio, where she ran the whole show, developing a house style that relied in part on an inventiveness born of economy. What follows, along with dance films and travelogues, is the nascent story film: fairy tales, comedies, trick films, adaptations of literature (Faust's deal with Mephistopheles in two easy minutes, the life and death of Jesus in thirty), satires (like the gleeful farce The Results of Feminism), morality plays, and even films with sound.

In 1907, at age thirty-four, she married and, when Gaumont sent her new husband to Cleveland to promote its sound-film device, Guy gave up her position and followed. The chronophone never caught on (they lived off her dowry and savings) so she returned to directing and producing silent films in the U.S. She was successful enough to build her own studio complex in Fort Lee, New Jersey, supervising its expanse on horseback. She made the transition to feature production, both at Solax and later freelancing. Even as her fortunes declined, her studio in arrears, her husband run off to Los Angeles with an actress, Guy rebounded as a director-for-hire on films such as 1918's *The Great Adventure* starring Bessie Love. Louis Feuillade, Ferdinand Zecca, Lois

Weber, among many others, all passed through Guy's studio doors on one continent or the other, exposed to her revolutionary acting philosophy: "Be Natural."

Behind the scenes, her life was no less exciting. She took paraffin injections to plump up her cheeks in order to improve her appearance on film. She raised a son and daughter, once escaping to Canada to avoid an outbreak of polio. During World War I, she spent time in North Carolina volunteering for the Red Cross and nursing her children through measles. Once in Chicago, one of them was kidnapped for a few hours—kidnapped?!—that's all we know, except that afterward she bought a handgun for protection. She recovered from the Spanish Flu, a pandemic that claimed up to fifty million lives worldwide, including those of four Solax employees.

Then, she had to write herself back into film history. In his memoir published in 1930, Léon Gaumont omitted everything before 1907, thereby cutting out Guy completely. When Guy wrote asking him not to leave out those years, he agreed for the book's second edition, which never made it into print. She struck up a correspondence with Gaumont's son Louis and a subsequent speech he gave about her garnered her some public recognition. After some well-received lectures, Guy began her own memoirs, although they went unpublished until eight years after her death. In 1955, she received the Legion of Honor (Gaumont received his in 1924), and, in 1957, the French Cinémathèque hosted a celebration of her. Now, one hundred years after the end of her career, the enormous scope of her contribution is finally coming to light, with archivists combing through collections, recovering about one-hundred-fifty titles so far and parsing the history to pay her proper due.

- SHARI KIZIRIAN

Based on "The Life and Times of Alice Guy Blaché" published by Fandor in 2012.









THE FILMS

PRINT SOURCE Kino Lorber, courtesy of Gaumont Pathé

MIDWIFE TO THE UPPER CLASS

Midwife to the Upper Class (Sage-femme de Première Class, 1901) is a sardonic variation on the single-shot La Fée aux Choux from 1896 in which a cabbage-patch fairy plucks newborns from the blooms and displays them for the camera. In the two-shot *Midwife*, a persnickety bourgeois couple visits the cabbage fairy and annoys their way into the "backroom" where infants are cultivated. Guy appears in drag alongside frequent Gaumont players, sisters Yvonne and Germaine Mugnier-Serand. Guy always named La Fée aux Choux as her first film, affirming further that she directed everything on the terrace at Gaumont's lab in the Belleville neighborhood of Paris. Recent scholarship claims, however, that Midwife is the earliest film for which she can be definitively credited as director. Uncertainty about who did what when at the beginning of cinema is complicated by lost films, sparsely surviving documentation, history's unfortunate track record of attributing Guy's films to others, not to mention our modern-day emphasis on roles that were less clearly defined at the time.

THE RESULTS OF FEMINISM

What is known is that Guy was in charge of production at least since Gaumont's large glass studio went up in 1904, and likely at some point prior. According to set designer Henri Ménessier, she also edited and made the titles for her own films, working "at night when no one else was around." In the role-reversal comedy *The Results of Feminism (Les Résultats du Féminisme*, 1906) there's no cross-dressing (unless you count the flowers pinned in the men's hair) but the husbands do all the housework and childcare, while the women idle in cafés and chase lovers. In 1912 Guy remade the film at her Solax studio as *In the Year 2000*.

MADAM HAS HER CRAVINGS

Even as Guy made everything from trick films to period dramas, comedy was her mainstay. In *Madam Has Her Cravings* (*Madame a des Envies*, 1906) a pregnant woman turns a Sunday stroll into a rampage to satisfy her appetites. The film is injected with the Continental raciness typical of Guy and, according to film scholar Kim Tomadjoglou, caused her later problems with American censors.

THE DRUNKEN MATTRESS

A stunt-filled delight, *The Drunken Mattress* (*Le Matelas Alcoolique*, 1906) features former circus performer Roméo Bosetti (who became a director under Guy) as a drunkard who is accidentally sown up in a mattress then goes tumbling all around Belleville. At Gaumont, Guy developed a knack for keeping settings varied and costs low by shooting on location.

THE GLUE

Also known as *Tommy and the Gluepot* in the U.S., *The Glue* (*La Glu*, 1907) takes a boy's mischief to sticky extremes as he slathers the adhesive on any inconvenient surface he can find.

THE OCEAN WAIF

At her U.S. studio Guy directed this 1916 feature starring Doris Kenyon and Carlyle Blackwell about an abused orphan in a fishing village who takes refuge at an abandoned estate. Guy had built Solax into a respected brand but by mid-decade the movie business was in flux, with the demand for longer, more elaborate films driving up costs and centralizing the industry already relocating to the West Coast. To keep in the game, Guy rented out her facility to other producers and tailored her own releases to specific distributors. She crafted *The Ocean Waif* for William Randolph Hearst's International Film Service, whose fare, in the words of film historian Victor Bachy, followed the "Mary Pickford school of narrative."



WOMAN'S PLACE IN PHOTOPLAY PRODUCTION

BY MADAME ALICE BLACHÉ

has long been a source of wonder to me that many women have not seized upon the wonderful opportunities offered to them by the motion picture art to make their way to fame and fortune as producers of photodramas. Of all the arts there is probably none in which they can make such splendid use of talents so much more natural to a woman than to a man and so necessary to its perfection.

There is no doubt in my mind that a woman's success in many lines of endeavor is still made very difficult by a strong prejudice against one of her sex doing work that has been done only by men for hundreds of years. Of course this prejudice is fast disappearing and there are many vocations in which it has not been present for a long time. In the arts of acting,

music, painting and literature, woman has long held her place among the most successful workers, and when it is considered how vitally all of these arts enter into the production of motion pictures one wonders why the names of scores of women are not found among the successful creators of photodrama offerings.

only is a woman as well fitted to stage a photodrama as a man, but in many ways she has a distinct advantage over him because of her very nature and because much of the knowledge called for in the telling of the story and the creation of the stage setting is absolutely within her province as a member of the gentler sex. She is an authority on the emotions. For centuries she has

given them full play while man has carefully trained himself to control them. She has developed her finer feelings for generations, while being protected from the world by her male companions, and she is naturally religious. In matters of the heart her superiority is acknowledged, and her deep insight and sensitiveness in the affairs of cupid give her a wonderful advantage in developing the thread of love which plays such an all important part in almost every story that is prepared for the screen. All of the distinctive qualities which she possesses come into direct play during the guiding of the actors in making their character drawings and interpreting the different emotions called for by the story. For to think and to feel the situation demanded by the play is the secret of successful acting, and sensitiveness to those thoughts and feelings is absolutely essential to the success of a stage director.

qualities of patience and gentleness possessed to such a high degree by womankind are also of inestimable value in the staging of a photodrama. Artistic temperament is a thing to be reckoned with while directing an actor, in spite of the treatment of the subject in the comic papers, and a gentle, soft-voiced director is much more conducive to good work on the part of the performer than the over-stern, noisy tyrant of the studio.

Not a small part of the motion picture director's work, in addition to the preparation of the story for picture-telling and the casting and directing of the actors, is the choice of suitable locations for the staging of the exterior scenes and the supervising of the studio settings, props, costumes, etc. In these matters it seems to me that a woman is especially well qualified to obtain the very best results, for she is dealing with subjects that are almost a second nature to her. She takes the measure of every person, every costume, every house and every piece of furniture that her eye comes into contact with, and the beauty of a stretch of landscape or a single flower impresses her immediately. All of these things are of the greatest value to the creator of a photodrama and the knowledge of them must be extensive and

exact. A woman's magic touch is immediately recognized in a real home. Is it not just as recognizable in the home of the characters of a photoplay?

That women make the theatre possible from the box-office standpoint is an acknowledged fact. Theatre managers know that their appeal must be to the woman if they would succeed, and all of their efforts are naturally in that direction. This being the case, what a rare opportunity is offered to women to use that inborn knowledge of just what does appeal to them to produce photodramas that will contain that inexplicable something which is necessary to the success of every stage or screen production.

There is nothing connected with the staging of a motion picture that a woman cannot do as easily as a man, and there is no reason why she cannot completely master every technicality of the art. The technique of the drama has been mastered by so many women that it is considered as much her field as a man's and its adaptation to picture work in no way removes it from her sphere. The technique of motion picture photography like the technique of the drama is fitted to a woman's activities.

is hard for me to imagine how I could have obtained my knowledge of photography, for instance, without the months of study spent in the laboratory of the Gaumont Company, in Paris, at a time when motion picture photography was in the experimental stage, and carefully continued since my own laboratory in the Solax Studios in this country. It is also necessary to study stage direction by actual participation in the work in addition to burning the midnight oil in your library, but both are as suitable, as fascinating and as remunerative to a woman as to a man.

Originally published in the July 11, 1914, issue of *Motion Picture World*, as part of a special section on the state of the industry. Other contributors included William Selig, D.W. Griffith, Edwin S. Porter, Herbert Blaché, Mary Fuller, and Carl Laemmle.

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THE MARRIAGE CIRCLE

LIVE MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT BY MONT ALTO MOTION PICTURE ORCHESTRA

DIRECTED BY ERNST LUBITSCH, USA, 1924

CAST Florence Vidor, Monte Blue, Marie Prevost, Adolphe Menjou, Creighton Hale, Harry Myers, and Dale Fuller **PRODUCTION** Warner Bros. **PRINT SOURCE** Museum of Modern Art

rnst Lubitsch's marriage movies are sophisticated, witty, and timeless, and one of the best is his 1924 film, The Marriage Circle. It takes place in Vienna, "the city of laughter and light romance," and it begins with an unexpected focus: a man has a hole in the toe of his sock. It's a very eloquent hole, of course, because this is a Lubitsch movie. The hole is the definition of a marriage in which the husband has no socks, no shirt collars, and no satisfaction, but his wife has drawers crammed full of everything she needs. Furthermore, she's not interested in his sock, throws his clothes carelessly onto the bed, grabs his shaving mirror out of his hands to put on her makeup, and generally ignores him while she primps for whatever interesting new man is going to come her way. It's obvious from the very beginning that The Marriage Circle will be a modern comedy of manners as well as a comedy about modern manners. It will play out on a polite, well-behaved surface, but sex—to do or not to do—is boiling underneath and on everyone's mind.

Circle's plot is a mélange of marital missteps and misunderstandings, a merry-go-round for grown-ups. A happily married couple (Florence Vidor and Monte Blue) become entangled with the sockless sufferer (Adolphe Menjou) and his faithless wife (Marie Prevost) who happens to be Vidor's "best friend." Menjou's socks and Prevost's lust lead to Blue's temptation and Vidor's frustration ... and then Menjou's machinations cause Vidor's despair and Blue's prevarication until things sort out and Prevost becomes the victim of Menjou's rejection. All four are

observed by the interfering Creighton Hale, a bachelor who stands around hoping to cash in on Vidor's disappointment.

All Circle's characters are well played by actors who are more than a cast: they are an ensemble in perfect sync. Florence Vidor, the first wife of director King Vidor, was a major silent star who embodied a softly beautiful, feminine woman of intelligence and the strength to fight for herself if necessary. (She left movies to wed her second husband, violinist Jascha Heifitz.) Monte Blue was an Indiana boy, a big six-foot-three guy from a background of poverty who worked his way to Hollywood as ranch hand, firefighter, circus rider, lumberjack—and even managed to graduate from Purdue along the way. He brings to the Lubitsch universe a comic gift. He's believable as both a husband dumb enough to get into hot water and shrewd enough to lie his way out of it. Marie Prevost is one of the silent era's most iconic figures, having done all the things a colorful Hollywood life requires. She was a Sennett bathing beauty, had an affair with Howard Hughes, and died an alcoholic at the age of forty. Her death even has the necessary scandal: it was incorrectly reported that her little dog nibbled on her dead body to stay alive before her corpse was discovered. (Joan Crawford, a loyal friend, paid for Prevost's funeral.) Lubitsch called Prevost "a master at underplaying." In Circle, she's perfect as a woman who knows what she wants ("I need love") and who moves quickly from man to man if she doesn't get it fast enough. (In one flamboyant scene, she tries to seduce Blue, ultimately threat-

A MERRY-GO-ROUND FOR GROWN-UPS

ening to shoot herself if he doesn't deliver. After he escapes her clutches, she nonchalantly flops down on a couch and starts filing her nails.)

Adolphe Menjou is impeccable in the role of the coldly observant husband who knows how to handle a straying wife. (He hires a detective.) He may play a

American Male" award nine times, and his extreme right-wing politics made him a star witness in the notorious HUAC investigations into alleged Hollywood communism. Menjou had a long film career, appearing in a distinguished list of films, both silent and sound, from 1914 to 1960: Chaplin's A Woman of Paris (1923), Valentino's The Sheik (1921), Morocco (1931), Little Miss Marker (1934), State of the Union (1948), and Paths of Glory (1957). He acted alongside everyone from Fred Astaire to Kirk Douglas, Marlene Dietrich to Betty Grable, and was directed by von Sternberg, Capra, and Kubrick, among others. His dominant film image is that of the dapper sophisticate with a tart tongue (although he did do

other things, such as a French trapper in the western set in the 1800s, *Across the Wide Missouri*). He anchors the Round Robin marital shenanigans with a casual, but cruel gravitas.

The fifth wheel of the movie is Creighton Hale, an Irish-born actor who came to America in the 1910s and appeared successfully in many important silent films: Orphans of the Storm, The Cat and the Canary, Way Down East, and others.

Although his success declined when sound arrived, his clean-cut

arrived, his clean-cu face, his professional demeanor, and his ability to play a variety of roles kept him employed. He was undistinctive, but reliable, the perfect fellow to be cast as a plot device.



wronged husband in the plot, but he ruthlessly sets up his hapless wife for his own purposes. Menjou is known today for two things outside his film work. His fabulous wardrobe landed him a "Best Dressed

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Ernst Lubitsch is the real star of The Marriage Circle. It was only his second American movie, the first having been Rosita. starring Mary Pickford. With a long and successful career in Germany behind him, and with all of Hollywood's money and toys to play with, Lubitsch advanced his reputation with Circle. He directs his actors well and uses a minimum of title cards, letting an audience "read" the "thoughts" of his players. (It's the beginning of what we know as modern star acting.) He's very precise

with images, as when Vidor cuts a handful of roses for her husband to take to his office. The flowers advance the plot, define relationships (both true and false), suggest decisions made internally by each of the three, and clearly delineate misunderstandings. Lubitsch maneuvers a loving wife, an obtuse husband, and a hot-to-go bachelor into the stuff divorce is made of ... without really telling the audience anything. He lets us see it for ourselves by following the roses as they are passed about, managing to complicate the lives of three characters without any of them realizing what's happening.

Lubitsch's marriage movies make an interesting comparison to those of his compatriot, Cecil B. DeMille, who could be called the Father of the American Movie Marriage. Lubitsch was champagne to DeMille's hearty ale. There's a kind of freedom from danger in Lubitsch's marital woes. Everyone is essentially too well-mannered for any real disaster to occur. DeMille, his opposite, tells the marriage story as a cautionary tale (Don't Change Your Husband or Why Change Your Wife?), but he also eroticized the union, ironically commandeering it for the purpose of showing a little sin that could be repudiated.



In The Marriage Circle, Lubitsch suggests that, if a marriage is to survive, it will need more than love and romance. In a world full of temptation, it will need a lot of luck ... and the skill to tell adroit lies on the spur of the moment. It will have to maneuver through jealousy, infidelity, sexuality, dubious friendship, and just plain boredom. Manners are more important than morals, so a husband and a wife will have to know the rules of the game. (Advice is available: "There's more danger in dancing than dining.") In the end, Circle's loving couple stay together, but they've become more aware of their own sexuality and that has made each more exciting to the other. Wised up as they are, they're happier than ever. It seems that just thinking about sin can pay off! What a great Lubitschian lesson for us all.

- JEANINE BASINGER

Left: Marie Prevost and Monte Blue. Above: Adolphe Menjou and Marie Prevost



ACTING LIKE

BY MARGARITA LANDAZURI

stage actor before he was a film director Ernst Lubitsch was notorious for acting out the roles for his performers down to the smallest gesture. As exasperating as it may have been to the actors to be controlled in this way, the strategy "may explain the consistency of tone in his films," according to Rob Kendt of Backstage magazine, who notes about Lubitsch's talkies, "the teasing, modulated diction giving way to sharp bursts and left turns, all orchestrated with an exquisite sense of style and timing." The performances in his films are part of what earned his style the sobriquet, the "Lubitsch Touch," which is evident from his first American silents.

The German-born Lubitsch had a rough beginning in Hollywood and famously clashed with Mary Pickford on the historical romance, Rosita (1923), his American directorial debut. Pickford called him "a perfect autocrat" and later explained her dislike of her performance as a street singer in Seville who catches the eye of the king: "Being a European, he liked to do naughty and suggestive things. He tried to be as moral as he knew how and I tried to be slightly naughty ... the result was pretty terrible." Critics and audiences at the time disagreed, responding favorably to both the directing and Pickford's performance.

The elegantly spare and modern The

welcome change for Lubitsch after the headaches of Pickford and a big budget period film, and it marks a significant turning point in his career toward the sly, sophisticated comedies that are his legacy. Cinematographer Charles Van Enger recalled working on the first of five films with him: "He would come in in the morning, no script, he would know exactly where everybody was going to be, he would know what camera angle he wanted, and not once did he look through the camera as long as I was with him." When they were setting up, Van Enger noticed how Lubitsch acted out each part himself to show the actors how he wanted them to do it. The cinematographer shot the preparations and later showed them along with the dailies, which delighted Lubitsch who grew to expect them, eagerly asking Van Enger, "Sharley, where's my scenes?" Actor Adolphe Menjou, who plays jaded husband to Marie Prevost's boldly faithless wife, was less amused. "All I ever had to do to make Lubitsch happy," he guipped about his two films with the director, "was to step before the camera and mimic every gesture he gave me."

arie Prevost, plucked from a career of stereotypical roles by Lubitsch, told a writer who visited The Marriage Circle set that she was "terribly discouraged" when shooting began. "He made me do simple scenes-just coming in and out of rooms-fifteen or twenty times. At first it seemed as tho there wasn't any sense to it at all. Then it began to dawn upon me what the art of acting was all about." This apparently heavy-handed direction on the set resulted in the subtlest of portrayals and critics took note. The New York World exclaimed: "Mr. Lubitsch is a man who will tell you a chapter with the fling of an actor's hand, the shifting of a silken ankle. He can do more with a half minute of utter silence on the part of a character than many directors find possible to do with fifteen minutes of ponderous dramatic acting." Moving Picture News described the effect: "We could mention a dozen scenes, which are as light as moondust-and which wouldn't bear analysis judging them by dramatic

substance. Yet they scintillate with delightful subtleties." The New York Times' curmudgeonly critic Mordaunt Hall led his review simply: "It is unalloyed bliss to watch The Marriage Circle."

rnst Lubitsch was in his early thirties and just getting started. Working on his third American film, Forbidden Paradise, Lubitsch guided star Pola Negri, who had become famous in the seven films they made together in Germany, to the kind of performance that eluded her in her previous American releases. "Lubitsch," wrote Picture-Play, "seems to give her face gayety, happiness and charm." For Kiss Me Again, in which he cast Marriage Circle's Marie Prevost and Monte Blue in another domestic comedy, the critics heaped more praise on the director's maturing style: "He takes Marie Prevost, Monte Blue, Clara Bow and John Roche and makes them excruciatingly funny," said Picture-Play's clearly smitten reviewer about the now lost film. "After most domestic mix-ups, where things either end in tragedy or Keystone kops, it is pleasant to find a happy medium where old situations are ridiculed and made inconsequential."

After ten American silents, Lubitsch transitioned to sound with a series of musical comedies (remaking The Marriage Circle in 1932 as One Hour With You starring Maurice Chevalier and Jeannette MacDonald) then went on to perfect the romantic comedy, always with his artful dissection of sex and romance. When he died of a heart attack in 1947, at the age of fifty-five, Lubitsch left behind many classics, including Trouble in Paradise, Design for Living, and Ninotchka, as well as many admirers. In Who the Devil Made It, a series of conversations with giants of Hollywood's Golden Age, author Peter Bogdanovich writes that Lubitsch was the one filmmaker that "nearly every other director I ever interviewed mentioned with awe as among the very best."

Marriage Circle must have been a



THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA

LIVE MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT BY BERKLEE SILENT FILM ORCHESTRA

DIRECTED BY RUPERT JULIAN, USA, 1925

CAST Lon Chaney, Mary Philbin, Norman Kerry, Arthur Edmund Carewe, George B. Williams, Bruce Covington, Virginia Pearson, and Snitz Edwards **PRODUCTION** Universal-Jewel **PRINT SOURCE** Kino Lorber

efore Dracula, before Frankenstein, before the Universal Pictures Corporation understood there was money to be made scaring the bejesus out of its audience, there was the Phantom. He is the unholy spawn of three mismatched parents: a French writer who claimed his fiction was fact-based, a brilliant actor whose career was built playing villains and outcasts, and a studio head who-like a torch-wielding villager-feared and almost destroyed the monster he never understood. The roots of the Phantom movie lie in Gothic fairy tales like "Beauty and the Beast" and "Bluebeard," in films such as the 1913 Fantômas serial, and even in the disfigured veterans of World War I. He anticipates both superheroes and psychotics, with future shock purveyors like Hitchcock and William Castle endlessly reworking his monstrous reveal, the moment of unmasking, that makes the unwary jump.

In 1924 the Phantom was just a means for Universal to get one more picture out of money-maker Lon Chaney, who had been a box-office smash in *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* the previous year. When studio chief Carl Laemmle announced at a sales convention that he'd booked Chaney again, his audience gave him a standing ovation. No one cared what the as-yet-unnamed picture was; Chaney meant profits. Gaston Leroux's *Phantom* was a last-minute, second choice, according to Philip J. Riley's book on the film, picked by Chaney after Laemmle's planned adaptation of *The Man Who Laughs* fell through.

Leroux invented the Phantom in 1909 shortly after he retired from journalism to write potboilers like the 1907 locked-room mystery *The Mystery of the Yellow Room.* Inspired by a tour of the extensive cellars beneath the Paris Opera, Leroux spun a fantastical tale of a disfigured musical genius living in the bowels of the Opera who stalks a young singer. The novel is soaked in late-Victorian decadence, its preoccupation with the heroine's purity in the face of her obsessed stalker-kidnapper a transparent veil for titillation. Laemmle's former protégé Irving Thalberg purchased the book for Universal just before ditching penny-pinching Uncle Carl for the newly formed Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. "That ungrateful little bastard is leaving me with a million dollar picture that has a misshapen freak as the main character!" Laemmle wailed, according to Riley.

After Thalberg's departure the studio shelved the property as too morbid. Even when the idea was revived, the studio proposed turning it into a historical swashbuckler called *The Phantom Swordsman*, but Chaney insisted on a script that followed Leroux's story. Costar Mary Philbin, who plays the Phantom's virginal victim Christine, later recalled that Chaney distributed excerpts from the novel to his castmates. The studio, however, never stopped tinkering with the story. After a contentious shoot the film went through a torturous string of rewrites, reshoots, and re-edits before—and after—its 1925 release.

The problems began with the director. Chaney wanted Erich von Stroheim, but the studio picked Rupert Julian, an actor/director who, like Stroheim, had made his reputation playing evil Germans (he specialized in Kaiser Wilhelm). Julian, who had rescued

Lon Chaney and Mary Philbin



sympathetic member of the cast, giving her subtle direction while shooting their scenes together. "You couldn't see his lips move under the mask and there were no mikes to pick up his voice," Philbin said years later of Chaney.

Universal had put all its resources behind the production. The elaborate opera house set, based on Palais Garnier's original blueprints, is on dazzling display in the opening montage.

It was so lavish and solidly built that it was reused for several subsequent Universal productions, including the 1943 *Phantom* remake. The Phantom's subterranean world, with its gloomy Gothic arches and underground lake, is based on drawings by consulting artist Ben Carré, who'd done sets for Alice Guy Blaché. Universal hired Frenchman Carré because he'd actually worked at the Paris Opera, but Carré sketched the Phantom's lair out of his own imagination. The atmospheric world he created is the film's real strength, after Chaney. Universal also invested in color sequences, including a ballet number and the masked ball. The studio gave the production all that money could buy—everything except a coherent story.

After a preview in Los Angeles in January 1925, Universal's PR machinery stopped ballyhooing its latest super production. "Too much spook melodrama" writes MacQueen, summing up the sentiment of the comment cards. Laemmle cancelled the February premiere and turned his efforts to salvaging his half-million dollar investment. The scenarists feverishly rewrote while a new director shot additional footage, including a whole new ending; editors put in comic relief, beefed up the romance, and even added a duel and a barroom brawl while a series of production managers attempted to make Laemmle happy. It was Universal stalwart Lois Weber, according to Riley, who reviewed all the footage and reorganized the movie into a form that finally satisfied the boss. *The Phantom* premiered in New York on September 26, 1925, seven months after originally scheduled. The studio recut the film again, adding new scenes and actors, for sound and silent releases in 1929, which is the basis for the restoration seen today.

In this streamlined version whole characters from the original shoot disappeared, along with most of the added footage, and large chunks of backstory. Gone is Christine's visit to her father's grave, which helped explain her soft spot for the Phantom. Reams of script pages detailing the Phantom's origin story were reduced to a brief insert of a purported police report, a handwritten card with a few miscellaneous facts that seem to have been culled from different story conferences. Audiences will undoubtedly be confused by intertitles like "the strangler's work again," as all reference to the Phantom's earlier strangulation victims has been cut.

Yet the cuts that undermine narrative logic also refocus the film on the monster at its center. And if the plot holes left by the hasty extraction of so much material are still evident, the Phantom's obsessive and terrifying pursuit of Christine gains from the very lack of explanation. His menace becomes archetypal; he is every shadow we have started at, every dark fear, every unnamed threat. The perverse curiosity that leads Christine to snatch off his mask becomes part of the dream logic of classic horror, her need to see the monster trumping common sense. The film's new ending in which a torch-bearing mob pursues the Phantom through the streets of Paris, both delivered audiences from their fears and created another horror film cliché.

In 1924 Universal was stumbling uncertainly toward the horror movie that later became the studio's hallmark and when we watch *The Phantom* we are watching a genre in the making. Although critics were often dubious, the film was a hit. Audiences were only beginning to discover their capacity for masochistic thrills, their perverse desire to be frightened, and visceral need to confront their demons. The film's moment of truth, as horror, comes with the Phantom's unmasking. When Christine creeps up behind him and pulls away the mask he has forbidden her to touch, the Phantom doesn't immediately turn on her. He stands up from the organ, hideous face revealed, and glares, instead, at us.

- MONICA NOLAN

BERKLEE SILENT FILM ORCHESTRA

CONDUCTORS

Xiangming Niu

Yiren Wang

Joyce Oh Yong Yue

José Ignacio Santos Aquino

Lex Stout

Roberto Terreiro Prado

Xiyue "Diana" Lizhao

PLAYERS

Rose Hegele (voice)

Keren Basbug (flute)

Mary O'Keefe (oboe)

Issac Sebastian Erb (bassoon)

Shannon Leigh (clarinet/bass clarinet)

Chia-Hung Lu (horn)

Eren Basbug (keyboard)

Eunike Tanzil (keyboard)

Emilky Gelineau (violin)

Nathaniel Taylor (cello)

radilialilei layloi (cello)

Denzican Atkas (percussion)

FACULTY LEADERS

Sheldon Mirowitz (artistic director)

Rob Hayes (managing director)

Merry-Go-Round from Stroheim's budget-breaking extravagance, seems to have had all of Stroheim's ego with little of his talent and, on the Phantom set, he swiftly alienated cast and crew. Cameraman Charles Van Enger later said that by the end of the shoot Chaney refused to speak to Julian; it became Van Enger's job to relay Julian's instructions to which Chaney would reply, "Tell him to go to hell." According to film historian Scott MacQueen, Norman Kerry, who plays Christine's love interest Raoul, once charged the director on horseback. Kerry also provoked the dedicated Chaney with his lack of seriousness-for him, movie-acting was a means to pick up actresses. Mary Philbin, just twenty-one at the time, was one of his targets. She told Riley that Kerry kept groping her during their scene on the Opera roof: "I finally had to take his hand and hold onto it to prevent it from wandering." When she wasn't fending off Kerry, Philbin had to contend with her director, whose approach was to shoot take after take of her fainting, using the retakes as an excuse to rearrange her skirts and adjust the position of her legs. Philbin's on-screen stalker turned out to be the most

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HOW TO KILL A VILLAIN

BY FRITZI KRAMER

he version of The Phantom of the Opera that we see today does not share the melancholy ending of Gaston Leroux's source novel. A villain dying of a broken heart did not satisfy preview audiences so a kinetic new finale was shot. Erik the Phantom escapes but is soon surrounded by an angry mob. He holds up his hand to threaten the crowd—what is he holding? A fiendish weapon? A bomb, perhaps? Who knows what tricks the Opera Ghost has up his sleeve! It is, in fact, nothing at all. A last flourish from a true showman before the mob tears into him.

The bomb is all too real in an earlier Lon Chaney vehicle, The Ace of Hearts, in which he sacrifices himself so Leatrice Joy can live to find happiness. All that survives of him after the explosion is a hand gripping the playing card of the title. A dramatic eleventh hour sacrifice to save the object of their affection was a relatively common way to go for silent movie villains, and while Chaney remains the master of it in classics such as The Unknown, other performers died well in the end, too. Lew Cody attempts to terrorize a movie set with a giant wind machine in Souls for Sale but has a change of heart and throws himself into the blades in place of Eleanor Boardman. In a more complicated twist, criminal mastermind played by the charismatic Manuel de los Ríos dies trying to stop his own gang from blowing up a train containing his frenemies in the Mexican thriller El Tren Fantasma.

Being killed by one's own followers is another way for silent film villains to shuffle off the mortal coil. In Les Vampires, the killing is merciful as the colorfully named Satanas is sent a poisoned letter in prison by his aptly named successor, Venomous. Chaney, of course, feels the wrath of his former followers in both *The Penalty* and *West of Zanzibar* when his inevitable change of heart takes hold.

A great many silent film baddies live to be arrested or to atone, but a bloody fate at the hands of a vanquishing hero happens just as often. It's no coincidence that one of the specific story devices later banned under the Production Code was revenge in a modern setting. The quest for vengeance certainly led to one of the gorier scenes in silent cinema, when Behind the Door's Hobart Bosworth skins German U-boat commander Wallace Beery alive. A similar fate catches up to the murderer in the Mountie picture Where the North Holds Sway. The German drama Asphalt lacks the "ew" factor but not the enthusiasm with the young protagonist clubbing a gangster to death using the wrenchedoff arm of a wooden chair. However, no merry silent movie murder quite matches the 1920 version of Kismet in which Otis Skinner drowns wicked royal vizier Hamilton Revelle in the palace lily pond. Skinner wrenches his enemy's fingers from the edge, holds him underwater for a disturbingly realistic amount of time, and swings his legs gleefully as the submeraed man gives up his last breath.

antastical deaths are also possible. The false Brigitte Helm in Metropolis is burnt at the stake by a mob, revealing her mechanical nature when she dies—or perhaps "ceases to function" is more accurate. Her creator, played by Rudolf Klein-Rogge, is subsequently thrown off the balcony of the cathedral when he attempts to make off with the genuine Helm. The

Musidora in Judex (1916)

shoe is on the other foot in The Chess Player when Camille Bert attempts to invade the inner sanctum of an eccentric inventor and is surrounded and slashed to death by an army of sword-wielding automatons in powdered wigs.

eading ladies sometimes take up the mantle of villain slayer, with the 1910s being particularly co-ed in its villain elimination. Viola Dana tricks her enemy into chaining himself to the wall and then lashes him with a bullwhip in The Cossack Whip-the spoiler is in the title-but the actual murder is left to a supporting player. Dana did seventy-five percent of the work, though, and later recalled that the whip was quite heavy and cumbersome. In Judex, Musidora's villainess ends up in a fistfight with a champion swimmer and then drowns. Mary Pickford imagines herself as Morgiana in the Ali Baba sequence of A Little Princess and makes short work of the head thief with her dagger. And, of course, the title vampire of Nosferatu is lured to his daylight-drenched end by the heroine. The question of whether or not Lillian Gish actually shot probable rapist Montagu Love in The Wind is still open, given her character's mental state, but she certainly thought that she did.

Of course, silent film deaths could also get a laugh. In the Keystone short Barney Oldfield's Race for a Life, Ford Sterling spends much of the time throttling anyone who stands in his way like a bewhiskered

Darth Vader. When his plans are thwarted, he runs out of henchmen to strangle and must turn on himself. Wallace Beery, whose death record rivals that of Lon Chaney, dies twice in Three Ages. He falls off a cliff in the prehistoric section and, in the Roman section, he is crushed when Buster Keaton dislodges the pillars in the style of Samson. He could count himself fortunate that in the Modern Age he is merely left at the altar and likely destined for arrest. The darkest humor combines with drama in the climax of Spies. When Rudolf Klein-Rogge, clown by day and spy overlord by night, sees that his arrest is imminent, he shoots himself while performing. The audience laughs, delighted by this new trick from their favorite funnyman and reward him with a standing ovation.

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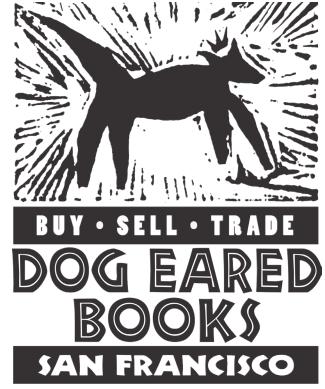
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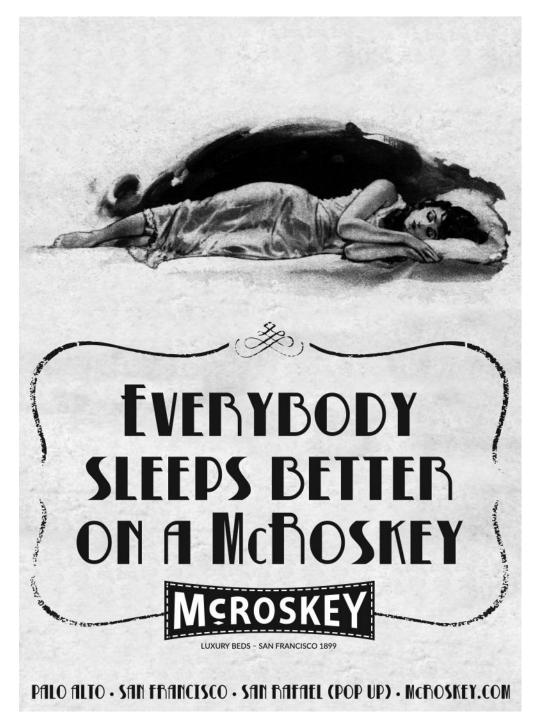
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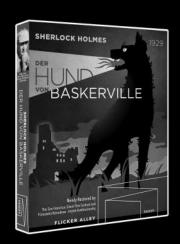
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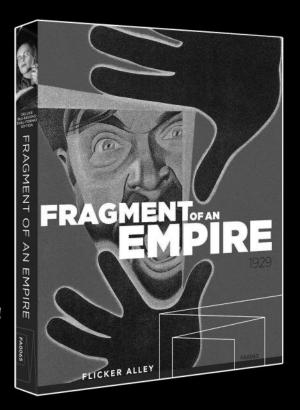
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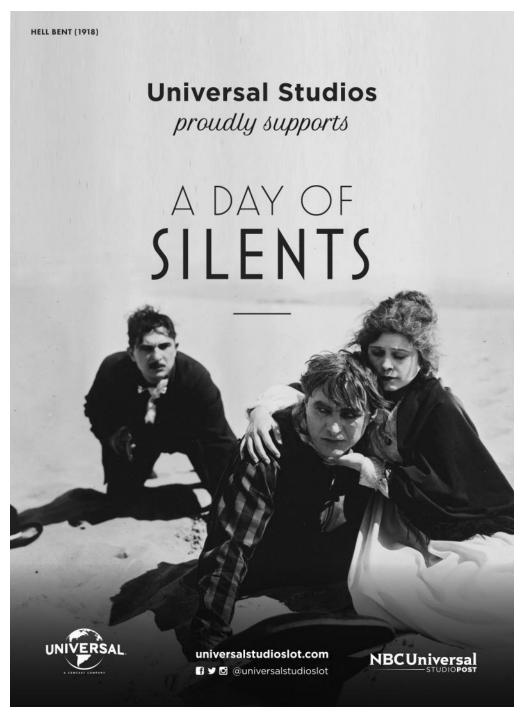
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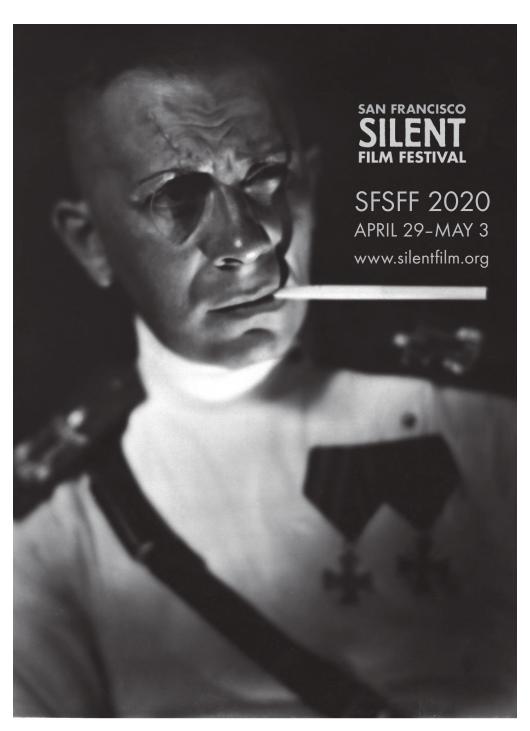
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