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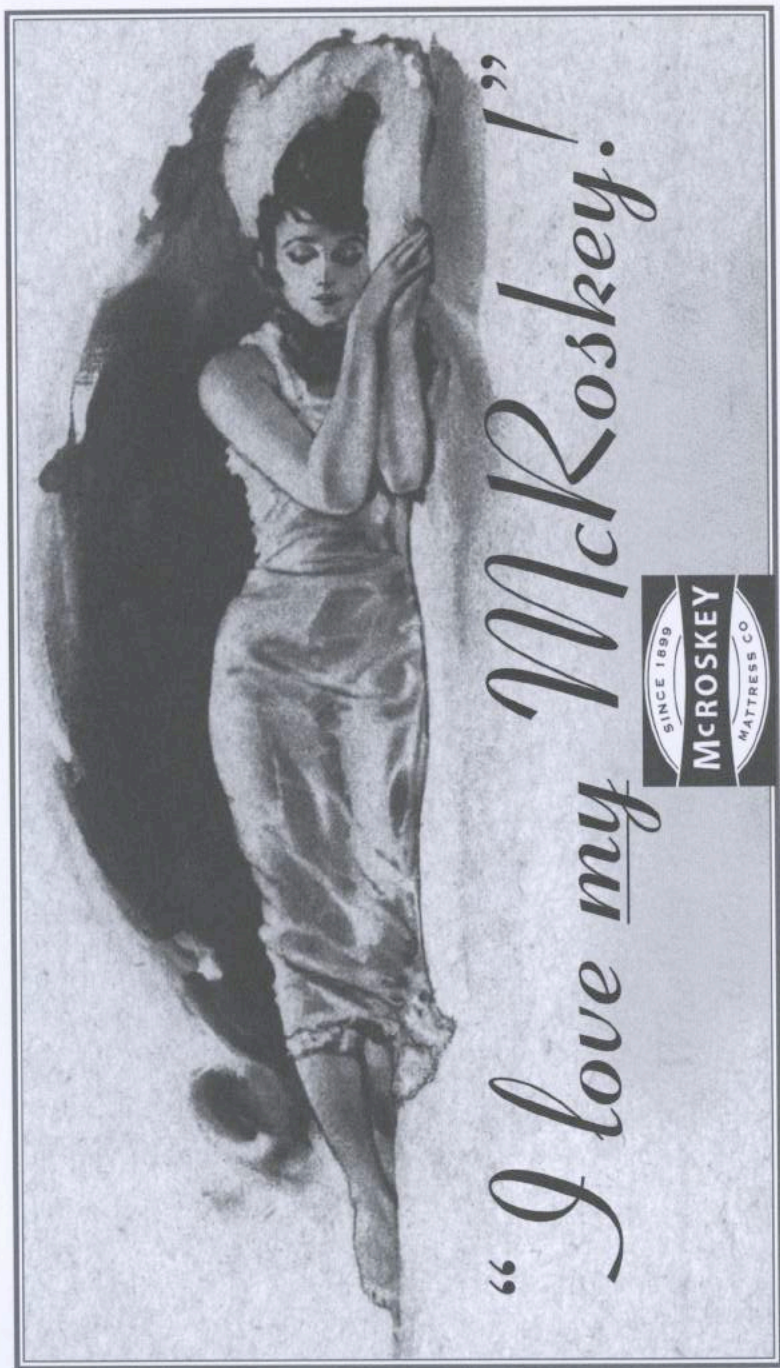


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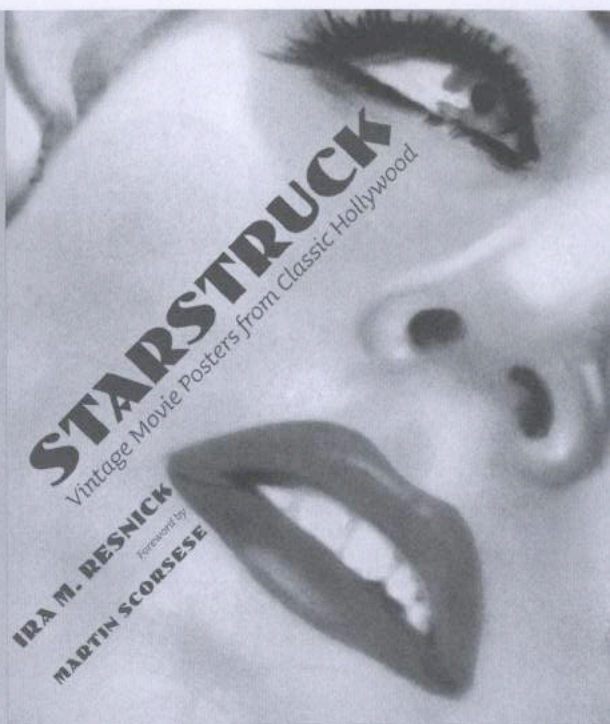
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# BOOK SIGNINGS

## on the Mezzanine...

### THURSDAY JULY 15

- 9:30pm **David W. Menefee** *George O'Brien: A Man's Man in Hollywood*  
**Ira Resnick** *Starstruck: Vintage Movie Posters from Classic Hollywood*

### FRIDAY JULY 16

- 12:30pm **Diana Serra Cary** *Whatever Happened to Baby Peggy?*  
 4:00pm **Richie Meyer** *Ruan Ling-Yu: The Goddess of Shanghai (DVD)*  
**Elaine Mae Woo** *Anna May Wong, Frosted Yellow Willows: Her Life, Times and Legend (DVD)*  
 7:30pm **Eddie Muller** *Dark City: The Lost World of Film Noir*  
**Scott O'Brien** *Ann Harding—Cinema's Gallant Lady*

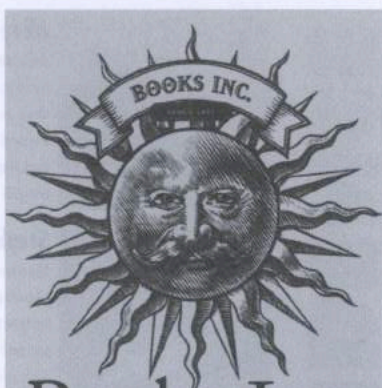
### SATURDAY JULY 17

- 11:15am **Leonard Maltin** *Leonard Maltin's 151 Best Movies You've Never Seen*  
**Pete Docter** *The Art of Up; Monsters, Inc. (DVD); Up (DVD)*  
 1:30pm **Festival Musicians** sign their CDs and DVDs  
 3:30pm **Robert Dix** *Out of Hollywood*  
**William Wellman, Jr.** *The Man and His Wings: William A. Wellman and the Making of the First Best Picture*  
**Jeffrey Vance** *Douglas Fairbanks*  
 5:30pm **Kevin Brownlow** *The Parade's Gone By*, along with his DVDs  
 8:45pm **Thomas Gladysz** *The Diary of a Lost Girl*  
**Samuel Bernstein** *Lulu: A Novel*  
**Ira Resnick** *Starstruck: Vintage Movie Posters from Classic Hollywood*

### SUNDAY JULY 18

- 11:15am **Gregory Paul Williams** *The Story of Hollywood: An Illustrated History*  
**David Kiehn** *Broncho Billy and the Essanay Film Company*  
**David Shepard** *Chicago (DVD)*  
**Elaine Mae Woo** *Anna May Wong, Frosted Yellow Willows: Her Life, Times and Legend (DVD)*  
 1:30pm **Anthony Slide** *Inside the Hollywood Fan Magazine*  
**Lucy Autry Wilson** (with David Kiehn) *George Lucas's Blockbusting*  
 4:00pm **Donna Hill** (with Emily Leider) *Rudolph Valentino, The Silent Idol: His Life in Photographs*  
 6:30pm **Kevin Brownlow** *The Parade's Gone By*  
**Jeffrey Vance** *Harold Lloyd: Master Comedian*  
**John Bengtson** *Silent Traces: Discovering Early Hollywood Through the Films of Charlie Chaplin*  
**David W. Menefee** *Sarah Bernhardt in the Theatre of Films and Sound Recording*

◆ Book and DVD signings follow screenings. Times above are approximate.



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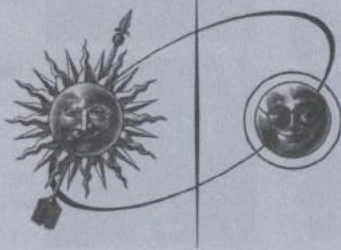
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## Alloy Orchestra

Alloy Orchestra is a three-man musical ensemble, writing and performing live accompaniment for classic silent films. Working with an outrageous assemblage of peculiar objects, they derive soulful music from unlikely sources. Members include: Terry Donahue (junk, accordion, musical saw, vocals), Ken Winokur (director, junk, percussion, and clarinet), and Roger Miller (keyboards). Alloy has performed at film festivals and cultural centers in the US and abroad (Telluride, the Louvre, Lincoln Center, National Gallery of Art).



## Stephen Horne

Stephen Horne has long been considered one of the UK's leading silent film accompanists. Based at London's BFI Southbank, he has recorded music for DVD, television, and museum installations. Although principally a pianist, he often incorporates flute and keyboards into his performances, sometimes simultaneously. He regularly performs internationally at film festivals in Pordenone, Telluride, and Berlin. As an adjunct to his work in silent film, he occasionally collaborates with a small group that recreates magic lantern shows.



## Dennis James

For more than 40 years Dennis James has toured under the auspices of the Silent Film Concerts production company performing for silent films with solo organ, piano, and chamber ensemble accompaniments in addition to presentations with major symphony orchestras throughout the U.S., Canada, Mexico, Australia, New Zealand, and Europe providing historically authentic revival presentations.



## Matti Bye Ensemble

Matti Bye, winner of the Golden Beetle (Sweden's Oscar) for his score for *Everlasting Moments*, has performed his compositions for silent film at the Swedish Film Institute in Stockholm since 1989. The Ensemble includes Bye on the piano and glockenspiel, Lotta Johansson (violin, musical saw), Kristian Holmgren (pump organ, electric guitar) and Laura Naukkarinen (vocals, toys). These artists are also known for their work in the improvisational bands Vinter, Maailma, and Lau Nau. This is their West Coast Premiere!



## Mont Alto Motion Picture Orchestra

The Mont Alto Motion Picture Orchestra, a quintet based in Louisville, Colorado, has created scores for 75 silent films since 1994. Reviving not only the sound but also the scoring techniques of the original silent movie theater orchestras, Mont Alto selects music for each scene from their large library of "photoplay music." Each piece you hear in their scores comes from surviving collections of this now-forgotten musical genre. Clarinet: Brian Collins. Violin: Britt Swenson. Piano: Rodney Sauer. Trumpet: Dawn Kramer. Cello: David Short.



## Donald Sosin

An acclaimed silent film accompanist for more than 30 years, Sosin regularly performs at major film festivals in America and Europe. He is the resident pianist for the Film Society of Lincoln Center, BAM, and the Museum of Moving Image, and frequently accompanies silents at other repertory houses and archives. Sosin has also premiered his orchestral scores on TCM and recorded numerous scores for DVD releases.



## Chloe Veltman

Chloe Veltman is a regular contributor to *The New York Times*. She is the host and producer of VoiceBox, a weekly public radio series dedicated to exploring the art of song on KALW 91.7 FM and is associate producer and scriptwriter for Keeping Score, a series of NPR classical music documentaries presented by San Francisco Symphony director Michael Tilson Thomas. In her spare time, Chloe enjoys playing the oboe and cor anglais in a variety of Bay Area chamber music groups and orchestras.



# Schedule of Events and Table of Contents

## Opening Night!

### Thursday, July 15

7:00 pm **THE IRON HORSE**

Live Accompaniment by Dennis James on the Mighty Wurlitzer

9:30 pm **Opening Night Party** at the top-floor loft of the McRoskey Mattress Company Building, 1687 Market Street

### Friday, July 16

11:30 am **AMAZING TALES FROM THE ARCHIVES**

Special Guests: Joe Lindner, Paula Félix-Didier, Fernando Peña, Kyle Westphal, Ken Fox

Live Piano Accompaniment by Donald Sosin

2:00 pm **A SPRAY OF PLUM BLOSSOMS**

Short Film: A surprise from the Georges Méliès collection!

Introduction: Richard J. Meyer

Live Piano Accompaniment by Donald Sosin

6:00 pm **ROTAIE**

Short Film: A surprise from the Georges Méliès collection!

Live Piano Accompaniment by Stephen Horne

8:15 pm **METROPOLIS Restoration!**

Special Guests: Eddie Muller, Paula Félix-Didier, Fernando Peña

Live Accompaniment by Alloy Orchestra

### Saturday, July 17

10:00 am **THE BIG BUSINESS OF SHORT, FUNNY FILMS** *Director's Pick selected by Pete Docter!*

Special Guests: Pete Docter, Leonard Maltin

Live Accompaniment by Dennis James on the Mighty Wurlitzer

12:00 noon **VARIATIONS ON A THEME: Musicians on the Craft of Composing and Performing for Silent Film**

With all of the festival musicians, moderated by Chloe Veltman

2:00 pm **THE FLYING ACE**

Short Film: A surprise from the Georges Méliès collection!

Special Guests: Ann Burt and Carolyn Williams of Norman Studios

Live Piano Accompaniment by Donald Sosin

4:00 pm **THE STRONG MAN**

Short Film: A surprise from the Georges Méliès collection!

*Silent Film Festival Award: Photoplay Productions*

Special Guests: Kevin Brownlow and Patrick Stanbury

Live Piano Accompaniment by Stephen Horne

6:30 pm **DIARY OF A LOST GIRL**

Centerpiece Film

*Founder's Presentation!*

*Melissa Chittick and Stephen Salmons* will be honored onstage at the program. Special introduction by Frank Buxton

Live Accompaniment by Mont Alto Motion Picture Orchestra

9:30 pm **HÄXAN: Witchcraft Through the Ages**

Short Film: A surprise from the Georges Méliès collection!

Live Accompaniment by Matti Bye Ensemble

### Sunday, July 18

10:00 am **AMAZING TALES FROM THE ARCHIVES**

Special Guests: Mike Mashon, Annette Melville

Live Piano Accompaniment by Stephen Horne

12:00 noon **THE SHAKEDOWN**

Short Film: A surprise from the Georges Méliès collection!

Onstage Interview with the Wyler Family by Leonard Maltin

Live Accompaniment by Donald Sosin

2:30 pm **MAN WITH A MOVIE CAMERA**

Short Film: A surprise from the Georges Méliès collection!

Introduction by Susan Oxtoby

Live Accompaniment by Alloy Orchestra

4:30 pm **THE WOMAN DISPUTED**

Short Film: A surprise from the Georges Méliès collection!

Introduction by Kevin Brownlow

Live Piano Accompaniment by Stephen Horne

### Closing Night Presentation!

7:30 pm **L'HEUREUSE MORT**

Short Film: A surprise from the Georges Méliès collection!

Introduction by Leonard Maltin

Live Accompaniment by Matti Bye Ensemble

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# Salmons Talks!

At the end of the 20th century, Melissa Chittick and Stephen Salmons had a dream to share their love of silent cinema with fellow San Franciscans and they founded the Silent Film Festival. Fifteen years later, the reality of their amazing creation has outstripped their wildest dreams. Today, the Silent Film Festival is the most important festival of its kind in the Americas, and a treasure for the worldwide community of film lovers. We congratulate Melissa and Steve on their brilliant vision and extend our hearty thanks. 

Since 1994, the Silent Film Festival has been presenting silent films at the Castro Theatre, San Francisco's ornate, gilded wonderland of wildly different architectural styles, designed to make any first-time moviegoer drop their jaw and say, "Wow," in dumbstruck appreciation. Built in the silent era, it is a palace well suited to an experience increasingly difficult to encounter: the live performance of a musical score to a silent film or, as it has been characterized by the great film historian Kevin Brownlow, Live Cinema.

Audiences at the Silent Film Festival are able to experience the nearly-but-not-quite-lost art form of Live Cinema. It's how the first film-makers, who discovered how to tell stories in moving pictures, meant for you to see—and hear—their films. It's how people saw films in the

silent era, in every movie theater, in every city, every night of the week. To refer to a film made between 1895 and approximately 1929 as a silent film is to ignore what accounts for, at the very least, half the experience of watching a silent film: the musical accompaniment that exponentially increases the joy of the experience.

The marriage of filmed images to live music can produce an experience so emotionally direct, it can make you feel like you've been hit by lightning. Withhold the down-to-earth, humdrum reality of talk and put in its place the vibrant, head-in-the-clouds beauty of music, and you find yourself responding to the film's narrative with complete empathy.

Silent films aren't dialogue-free; characters do talk to each other. We don't hear what they say. Instead, we read it, on title cards. We read it to ourselves, in our own heads, in our own voices,




and this makes the experience even more direct, more personal. Douglas Fairbanks, Louise Brooks, Charlie Chaplin, Clara Bow—these stars sound like every single one of us. Silent films were quickly recognized as a powerful art form not only for their dynamic visual appeal, but for the way they engage our imaginations, requiring us to play a role by contributing our own inner voices. We're in the film, we're part of the story, it's happening to us just as much as it's happening to Rudolph Valentino.

I hope you'll forgive me if I go out on a limb here, but I'm fairly convinced that movies were the greatest invention of the previous century. Others might name penicillin, the gas-piston engine, or even the Swanson TV Dinner, but me, I'll take movies. They opened up the world, brought it to our neighborhoods, entertaining and educating us on a scale never before thought possible. We were taken to the farthest corners of the earth, where we saw people like us, looking back. Movies gave us our first real opportunity to experience our common humanity. And within just a few short years of their invention, they matured into a completely original, indelible art form, unlike anything seen before.


At first, filmmakers photographed their stories from a single camera angle, which showed the action from a remove, in imitation of the experience of watching a play in a theater. Soon enough, filmmakers tried new things: cutting one scene together with another scene to suggest that the two scenes were occurring simultaneously in different places; changing camera angles during a scene, controlling what the viewer was able to see, unlike in the theater; and, perhaps the greatest discovery of all, putting the camera exclusively on a character's face. Today it's commonly known as the close-up, and we're used to it; we expect to see a character up close. But it was an absolute revelation to film-

makers of the silent era. They could put you just inches away from the face of a person and let you stare at it, let you invade their personal space, as we say today. Add music to that, and you became positively telepathic. If the musician played a sentimental ballad, you'd know that person must be sad; if a foxtrot, you'd know they were happy—and the actor playing that person wouldn't have to do anything more than widen their eyes or lower them.

There's a common misconception that the acting in silent films is broad and unsophisticated—lots of arm waving and chest thumping, playing to the last seat in the house. Not so. For those of you who are experiencing a silent film for the first time as it's meant to be seen and as it's meant to be heard, you're in for a real treat, perhaps even a revelation.

 **Stephen Salmons**

Adapted from Stephen Salmons's introduction to the San Francisco Symphony's April 2010 presentation of Charlie Chaplin's *The Gold Rush*

**Festival Founders Melissa Chittick and Stephen Salmons will be honored onstage at the Centerpiece Film presentation of G.W. Pabst's *Diary of a Lost Girl* on Saturday, July 17 at 6:30 pm** 



## THE IRON HORSE

Live Accompaniment by DENNIS JAMES on the Mighty Wurlitzer

CAST: George O'Brien (Davy Brandon), Madge Bellamy (Miriam Marsh), Cyril Chadwick (Jesson), Fred Kohler (Deroux), Gladys Hulette (Ruby), James Marcus (Judge Haller), J. Farrell MacDonald (Corporal Casey), James Welsh (Private Schultz), Walter Rogers (General Dodge), George Waggner (Colonel Buffalo Bill Cody), Jack Padjeon (Will Bill Hickok), Charles Edward Bull (Abraham Lincoln), Winston Miller (Davy as a child), Peggy Cartwright (Miriam as a child) PRODUCTION: Fox Film Corporation 1924 DIRECTOR: John Ford SCENARIO: Charles Kenyon TITLES: Charles Darnton STORY: Charles Kenyon, John Russell PHOTOGRAPHY: George Schneiderman PRINT SOURCE: Dennis James Collection

Under the best of conditions, the grueling, day-to-day pace of feature film production is exhausting. Factor in the hazards and pressure of shooting on a difficult location, and the shoot extracts an incalculable toll on the mind and body. Even if this stress is not evident on the screen, it still leaves indelible scars on those who lived through it. After filming on the barren desert flats of Nevada during the dead of winter for the epic western *The Iron Horse* (1924), property man Lefty Hough simply stated: "There was real suffering on that

picture. It was hard, tough, awfully primitive conditions. Christ, it was cold."

Considering the circumstances, skilled leadership was crucial, which is why William Fox, president of the Fox Film Corporation, chose John Ford to direct the picture. At the time only 29, Jack Ford—as he was then credited on the screen—had already directed more than 50 films, mostly westerns, with some of the genre's most popular actors: Harry Carey, Buck Jones, Hoot Gibson, and Tom Mix. Before becoming a

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director, he had worked in almost every capacity under the watchful eye of his accomplished older brother, director and actor Francis Ford who first employed him at the Universal Film Company in 1914. When William Fox suggested the credit "Directed by John Ford" for *Cameo Kirby* (1923), Ford's first big-budget production, which starred John Gilbert, he demonstrated the respect he already had for Ford as work began on *The Iron Horse*.

Before location shooting began, production staff rented 20 railroad sleeper cars from the Al G. Barnes Circus to house the company of 300 cast and crew. They used additional railcars to store equipment and materials for laying a mile of track and building two western town sets, plus appropriate props, wardrobe, and provisions. In November 1923, they found a location with a railroad spur track to park the long line of cars at Dodge, Nevada, about 50



*John Ford's silent masterpiece revolved in the details of the American frontier, portraying all echelons of society involved in the nation's westward expansion.*

miles east of Reno on the Pyramid Indian Reservation, and recruited some 300 Paiute Indians from the reservation for the film. Many of them doubled as Chinese extras, who were in short supply in the vicinity.

On December 13, Ford arrived in Reno with business manager Harry Updegraff and art director Rudolph Bylek to set up an operations office. Ford met Charles Edward Bull, a Reno justice of the peace, who was said to resemble Abraham Lincoln, a role to be cast for the film. Ford found Bull even more "in character" than had been reported and signed him for the part. The next day, Ford and Bylek went to Wadsworth, Nevada, ten

miles south of Dodge, to pick locations in the small town posing as Litchfield, Illinois. That night, Ford and Bylek took the train back to Los Angeles, while Updegraff stayed in Reno handling business details for the shoot.

Filming began in Los Angeles just after Christmas, shooting the interior shots with Charles Bull, Ford, Bull, and a core group then traveled north, passing through Reno on December 31 for the Litchfield prologue scenes. After only a few hours of filming, the company quickly moved on to Dodge, so they could welcome the 300 company members arriving from Los Angeles the next morning.

Freezing weather and a blanket of snow greeted them. The circus sleeper cars, designed for summer use, had no heat. George Schneiderman and his camera crew decided the Pony Express office set looked more inviting, so they outfitted it as their sleeping quarters, installing bunks and cover-

ing the missing walls with canvas. "We took the uniforms the studio had sent along as costumes for the soldiers," Ford said, "and wore them because they were warm." In the biggest tragedy on the shoot, one man succumbed to the cold. Louis F. Muessig, the dining car steward, developed pneumonia and died in a Reno hospital three weeks into their stay.

Encountering what the newspapers called a "baby blizzard," Ford turned to his cameraman and asked what to do about the snow. Schneiderman replied, "There must have been snow when they built the railroad so why don't we shoot anyway?" When later scenes were filmed on barren ground

and fresh snowfall wrecked continuity, Ford ordered the snow to be cleared away. "And that's what we did," Hough said. "We brought the cattle in, the horses and everything else. We swept the whole town off. It may sound unbelievable, but I don't suppose we lost more than a couple of hours. Well, now, you take 400 people, horses and cowboys, and Indians and everything else—they can sweep a street in pretty quick time."

On January 13, scenes of an immigrant wedding were shot on a moving train while cold winds swept across the flat land around them. They finished with the North Platte set by January 21, and the location was transformed into the town of Benton. By this time, the company had also laid a mile and a half of track.

The Reno-based newspaper *The Nevada State Journal* reported that the Fox Company was spending as much as \$45,000 a week on the production. The same article also announced that Sol Wurtzel was on location checking on the progress of the film, and he was gratified by what he saw. With location shooting slated to last 60 days until March 1, they were moving fast enough to wrap up production by February 14.

The big concluding scene, the driving of the Golden Spike, was shot on February 10, with 500 people on set. Seventy-five Shriners from Reno participated, wearing military uniforms. Fifty automobile-loads of visitors came from Reno to watch the event. That evening, they celebrated with a cast and crew party replete with vaudeville acts and a turkey feast.

*The Iron Horse* was Fox's answer to the wildly successful Paramount picture *The Covered Wagon* (1923), a film that had singlehandedly revived the public's sagging interest in westerns. Jesse Lasky, the vice-president in charge of production at Paramount, had championed *The Covered Wagon*, allowing it to be shot on an epic scale, giving it a generous \$500,000 budget, which eventually rose to \$750,000. The film recouped the full amount in just two New York theaters, going on to become the biggest hit of the year. Fox reportedly spent only \$280,000 on *The Iron Horse*, with Ford keeping it on schedule and within the budget (despite claims to the contrary in later years). The film was the top grossing movie of 1924.

—DAVID KIEHN

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Fox Film Corporation





## A SPRAY OF PLUM BLOSSOMS

Live Piano Accompaniment by DONALD SOSIN

CAST: Ruan Lingyu, as Lily Yuen (Hu Zhuli/Julia), Lin Chuchu (Shi Luohua/Silvia), Wang Cilong (Bai Lede/Proteus), Jin Yan, as Raymond King (Hu Lunting/Valentine), Gao Zhanfei (Diao Li'ao/Tiburio), Wang Guilin (General Shi), Chen Yanyan (A Qiao/Lucetta), Liu Jiqun (Fatty Zhu), Shi Juefei (Li Yi, the Old Bandit Chieftain), Zhou Lili (Female Guard/Lady-in-Waiting), Li Lili (Piano Player) PRODUCTION: Lianhua Film Company 1931 PRODUCER: Luo Mingyou DIRECTOR: Bu Wancang SCENARIO: Huang Yicuo, adapted from William Shakespeare's *Two Gentlemen of Verona* PHOTOGRAPHY: Huang Shaofen, ART DIRECTOR: Lu Shaofei. SETTINGS: Zhao Full PRINT SOURCE: China Film Archive

A woman with bobbed hair wears a form-fitting *qipáo* dress, holds an evening bag, and raises her hand in greeting as she alights from an airplane. This arresting image was used to advertise British American Tobacco Company cigarettes and illustrates the emergence of Shanghai's "modern woman." By the 1930s, the image of the Chinese woman as subservient, with bound feet, balancing elaborately styled hair, had been replaced by her 20th century version: chic, mobile, modern—code at the time for Western.

A center of international trade and commerce since the mid-19th century, Shanghai was divided into separate districts for English, American, French, Russian, and Chinese communities. By the 1930s, the port city was infiltrated by Western culture and technologies. Huge department stores opened on Nanjing Road, Chinese men sported Western-style suits, and automobiles and electric trams thronged the streets. Chinese advertising promoted a Western lifestyle, with images of stylish Chinese women playing golf,

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Underwritten by Richard J. Meyer and Susan Harmon

listening to gramophones, and dancing together. Nightlife in Shanghai catered to the large international population, with nightclubs, restaurants, and, inevitably, movie theaters.

The first public viewing of a film in China took place in a Shanghai teahouse in 1896. Billed as "electric shadow plays from the West," the screening was part of a roster that included magic acts and fireworks. Originally reliant on Western producers, the first Chinese-made production was the 1905 filmed swordfight based on the opera *The*

*Battle of Mount Dingjun*. The national film industry slowly gained momentum, culminating in the boom years of the 1920s and 1930s. Nearly half of all films produced in China during the boom were created in Shanghai, where China's first movie

theater opened in 1908. By 1930, the city was home to 53 movie theaters, showing mainly Chinese-produced films.

Hollywood had a major influence on the Chinese film industry. Film critics of the time compared national stars Ruan Lingyu and Jin Yan to Greta Garbo and Rudolph Valentino, respectively. Western-style serials such as *The Perils of Pauline* attracted large audiences, and homegrown love stories such as 1931's *The Peach Girl* and fallen-women dramas such as 1934's *Shénnü* became as popular as similar films were in the West.

In the years leading up to World War II, and especially following the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931, filmmakers had to tailor their subject matter to the fickle political climate. For example, if a film advocated Nationalism and opposed the Japanese, it also needed to condemn the ruling Kuomintang (KMT) government or risk

the wrath of the rising Communist Party (CCP). Famed director Sun Yu, whose films were overtly Nationalist, was deemed insufficiently anti-KMT and harshly criticized by the Communists, who finally ended his film career in 1951.

Bu Wancang (1903–1974), on the other hand, survived the upheavals of the war and its aftermath, directing films into the 1960s. An original member of the Shanghai cinema scene, Bu worked for several studios before becoming a major director for Mingxing. In 1931, Bu moved to



Jin Yan, Ruan Lingyu, and Lin Chuchu—China's biggest stars in the silent era—bring this delightful adaptation of Shakespeare's *Two Gentlemen of Verona* to life.

Mingxing's rival, Lianhua, where he directed *Love and Duty* (1931) and *The Peach Girl* (1931), both with actress Ruan Lingyu. However, Bu also ran afoul of politics. His 1932 film *Rendao* (*Humanity*), depicting the great drought that had devas-

tated northern China the year before, was criticized by the CCP for not blaming the natural disaster on the KMT.

As the war with Japan intensified, Bu made several films with subtle patriotic themes, notably 1939's *Mulan Joins the Army*, which became the most popular film produced in Shanghai during this period. A costume drama, it depicts the legend of the ancient heroine Mulan who grows up practicing martial arts. When her country is invaded, she disguises herself as a man and leads her father's army to victory. Under the Japanese, Bu was forced to make several propaganda films for the occupiers and, after the war, was ostracized by his colleagues for collaboration. He moved to Hong Kong in 1948 and made films there until his retirement in 1963.

The two stars of *A Spray of Plum Blossoms*, Ruan Lingyu and Jin Yang, were as adored as



their Western counterparts, Garbo and Valentino. Ruan was the most popular actress of her day, although her career was cut tragically short. She first appeared in Bu Wancang's *Husband and Wife in Name* (1927) for Mingxing and later went to work at Lianhua, where she made her best-known film *Shénnū* (*The Goddess*). In a change of pace from her usual roles as the love interest or doomed prostitute, she plays a comedic part in *A Spray of Plum Blossoms*, as Jin Yan's sister Julia, a modern girl bent on exposing her lover's infidelity.

In 1933, Ruan appeared on the inaugural cover of *Modern Screen*, which was modeled after Western-style fan magazines. Although they doubtless advanced her career, such publications may also have contributed to her untimely death. Hounded by the publicity surround-

ing her failed relationships, she took her own life at the age of 24. In her suicide note, she wrote, "Gossip is a fearful thing." Ruan's funeral brought thousands of fans into the streets and inspired several copycat suicides.

*A Spray of Plum Blossoms* was part of the craze for all things Western that swept through Shanghai in the early 1930s. Loosely based on Shakespeare's *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, the film features independent female characters and female-to-male cross-dressing, a device often used in Shakespeare's comedic plays. Sylvia, played by Lin Chuchu, is the daughter of a military general yet behaves more like a heroine from a Western serial. She spends her days galloping across

a rolling, open countryside (called "Canton" in the film), which stands in for the landscapes of the American West. With long, unbound hair, wearing a wide-brimmed hat and accompanied by two uniformed handmaidens, she is a world away from Ruan Lingyu's character, a sophisticated city girl sporting bobbed hair and *qipáo* dresses. Julia is the embodiment of the Shanghai "modern woman," arriving in Canton in a borrowed biplane. Although a country girl, Sylvia is defiant, choosing

her outlaw lover over an arranged match.

Shakespeare was not unknown in China, but the first complete translation of *Hamlet* did not appear in print until 1922, followed by *Romeo and Juliet* in 1924. In addition to its Western literary source, *Plum Blossom's* intertitles were written in English, perhaps to attract



Jin Yan, as Valentine, was China's equivalent of Rudolph Valentino, and was sometimes billed as Raymond King.

Shanghai's large international population to the film or to give it a Western cachet, even though few people outside Shanghai could read them. In addition, the main actors' names are Westernized in the credits, despite the stars' status as national treasures in China.

*Plum Blossom's* strong, assertive female characters and its cross-dressing theme reappear in Bu Wancang's subsequent film *Mulan Joins the Army*. Six decades later, Walt Disney Studios brought Bu's beloved Chinese heroine to the West when it remade his most successful film as the 1998 animated feature *Mulan*.

—VICTORIA JASCHOB



## ROTAIE

Live Piano Accompaniment by STEPHEN HORNE

CAST: Käthe von Nagy (The Young Woman), Maurizio D'Ancora (Giorgio), Daniele Crespi (Jacques Mercier), Giacomo Moschini (Friend of Jacques), Mario Camerini (Roulette Player), Carola Lotti (Young Blond Woman in Casino) PRODUCER: Giovanni Agnesi PRODUCTION COMPANY: S.A.C.I.A./Nero-Film 1928 DIRECTOR: Mario Camerini STORY: Corrado D'Errico SCENARIO: Mario Camerini, Corrado D'Errico PHOTOGRAPHY: Ubaldo Arata EDITOR: Mario Camerini PRODUCTION DESIGN: Umberto Torri, Daniele Crespi PRODUCTION MANAGEMENT: Constantin J. David PRINT SOURCE: Fondazione Cineteca Italiana

Italian Director Mario Camerini's legacy has been tainted because he made films under the Mussolini regime. Film director and critic Carlo Lizzani wrote of Camerini as "sweetly slumbering through the 20 years of Fascism." While Camerini spent much of the later Fascist era directing light, socially conservative comedies, he also made 1928's *Rotaie*, one of very few Italian films of the Fascist era to confront the social upheaval then gripping the country. *Rotaie* (*Rails*), portrays

the plight of an impoverished, despairing young couple who embark on a train journey after finding a wallet filled with money. Camerini uses the young couple's plight to explore a society thrown into disarray by a postwar economic crisis, the compression of time and space enabled by rapid train travel, and the rise of Fascism. If Camerini slept through Italy's Fascist era, *Rotaie* suggests his slumber was less than peaceful.

Camerini was born in Rome in 1895. Three

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Underwritten by Istituto Italiano di Cultura



years later the first film was shot in Italy, a brief sequence of Pope Leo XIII blessing the camera. Although his father was an established official within the Italian Socialist Party, Camerini showed no interest in politics and was drawn instead to the new art of filmmaking. At 18, he received his first credit as a writer for 1913's *Le mani ignote* (*Unknown Hands*), but his career was interrupted when Italy entered the First World War. He served in the army and was captured and imprisoned in Germany. Upon his return to Italy, he immediately resumed writing and directing, and, in 1923, he directed his first film, *Jolly, clown da circo* (*Jolly, the Circus Clown*). By 1926, Paramount brought Camerini to its Joinville studios outside Paris, where he learned to make Hollywood-style films for the European market.

Italy after the war was a different country than the one Camerini had left behind. A militant group led by Benito Mussolini had taken control of the government, promising to modernize Italy. Unlike other European nations, Italy had failed to embrace the Industrial Revolution of the 19th century, remaining a mostly agrarian economy with pockets of urban industry. Mussolini's brand of Fascism began as a movement of nationalistic industrialization. (Pressured by the Nazis, Italy later enacted racist policies similar to

Germany's National Socialists.) Central to Mussolini's propaganda project was a vision of a "regenerated" Italy, with a healthy economy, a united electorate, and a bright future. In practice, his policies caused a deeper economic crisis, increased social turmoil, and created a bleaker future. The destitute couple at the center of *Rotaie* represent the beleaguered Italian proletariat, struggling with the destruction of rural communi-

ties in service of modernization. While Camerini provides them with a moment of good fortune that vaults them into a higher social strata, the Italian working class as a whole was not so lucky. In spite of the failure of his economic agenda, Mussolini maintained his grip on power, thanks in part to the success of the Fascist propaganda machine.

"Cinema is the strongest weapon," Mussolini famously said when laying the cornerstone for Rome's Cinecittà studios in 1936. His son-in-law and minister of propaganda Galeazzo Ciano wrote that



Käthe von Nagy appeared in some 50 films before retiring to southern California, where she taught French during the 1950s and '60s.

"only by taking inspiration from ... the glories of its history ... can [cinema] speak of our spirit and document the flowering of a powerful and new civilization." Even prior to the arrival of Fascism, the earliest popular Italian films celebrated Greek and Roman history, notably Arturo Ambrosio's *The Last Days of Pompeii* (1908). Making movies

for propagandistic purposes was hardly an innovation of the Fascists. Italy's first narrative film, Filoteo Alberini's 1905 *The Capture of Rome*, portrayed the climactic event of the unification of Italy when the Papal army was overthrown in Rome in 1861. The film was largely funded by the Kingdom of Italy's Ministry of Defense.

Camerini made several films funded by the Fascist government, including 1928's *Kif tebbi*, which depicts heroic Italians liberating a grateful Libyan town from the Ottoman Empire and making it a new colony for Rome. On their surface, Camerini's films appear to support Lizzani's claim that the director tiptoed around controversy. The young Camerini seems to be trying to navigate the streams of political, artistic, and technological movements of the Fascist era. In *Rotaie*, Camerini boldly tackles these crosscurrents by propelling his protagonists across the borders of the working class and the bourgeoisie, his scenes across the borders of the city and country, and his cinematography across the borders of the avant-garde and the mainstream. He makes extensive use of montage, specifically of industrial symbols like train locomotives, which suggests a familiarity with contemporary Russian films like Sergei Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* (1925). He also borrows the chiaroscuro lighting style of German Expressionist films like F.W. Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1922) and Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927) for *Rotaie*'s tenebrous urban scenes. He attempts to reconcile the fanatical exaltations of industrial progress promulgated by Italian Futurist artists like Filippo Marinetti who were closely associated with the early days of Italian Fascism, with, as historian Ruth Ben-Ghiat has written, "the price those machines extract from those who labor to keep them running." He gives trains a central role, showing both the thrill and splendor of rapid travel as well as the destabilization brought about by linking previously distant cities with the country, the north with the south, and the poor with the rich.

Camerini used inexperienced actors in his films, believing they lent authenticity to the

drama. His leading lady, Hungarian Käthe von Nagy, was a relative unknown who had made less than ten films before starring in *Rotaie*. She would go on to moderate success in the 1930s before moving to southern California, where she spent the 1950s as a much-beloved French teacher. *Rotaie* was leading man Maurizio D'Ancora's first film, and, by the late 1940s, he quit the movies to work as a fashion designer at Gucci.

The legacy of *Rotaie* is best reflected in the postwar Italian Neorealists, who not only used non-professional actors in their films but also embraced the themes of Camerini's early works. Vittorio De Sica, who had his first leading role in Camerini's *Gli uomini, che mascalzoni!* (*What Rascals Men Are!*, 1932), cited *Rotaie*'s influence on his own films and said that Camerini taught him to be "truthful and sincere" in his filmmaking. Camerini's reputation, in the words of Lizzani, as "the great confessor of the Italian lower middle classes" was largely earned directing *telefoni bianchi*, a genre of bourgeois comedies so-named for its upper-class settings that prominently featured white enamel telephones. Yet even these stories anticipate the dreams of affluence aspired to by the characters in De Sica's *The Bicycle Thief* (1948).

In the 1920s, a decade of social and political turbulence in Italy, most Italian films consisted of spectacular historical dramas, light comedies, and action-packed historical epics, many of them made by Camerini himself. *Rotaie* stands out as a notable exception. While it concludes on a note far from open defiance, *Rotaie* made Camerini one of very few directors at the time willing to acknowledge that Italy, despite Mussolini's claims, was far from achieving a glorious second Roman Empire.

—BENJAMIN SCHROM





# METROPOLIS

Live Accompaniment by **ALLOY ORCHESTRA**

CAST: Brigitte Helm (Maria/The Machine Man [Robot Maria]), Alfred Abel (Joh Fredersen), Gustav Fröhlich (Freder), Rudolf Klein-Rogge (Rotwang), Fritz Rasp (The Thin Man), Theodor Loos (Josaphat), Heinrich George (Grot, the Guardian of the Heart Machine), Erwin Biswanger (\*11811\*), Olaf Storm (Jan) PRODUCTION: Universum Film AG (Ufa) 1927 DIRECTOR: Fritz Lang SCENARIO: Thea von Harbou PHOTOGRAPHY: Karl Freund, Günther Rittau TRICK PHOTOGRAPHY: Günther Rittau SPECIAL EFFECTS: Konstantin Tschetwerikoff PHOTOGRAPHIC COMBINATION PROCESS: Eugen Schüfftan SET DESIGN: Otto Hunte, Erich Kettelhut, Karl Vollbrecht PAINTING EFFECTS: Erich Kettelhut SCULPTURES AND ROBOTS: Walter Schultze-Mittendorf COSTUMES: Aenne Willkomm RESTORATION: Friedrich-Wilhelm-Murnau-Stiftung PRINT SOURCE: Kino International

The stunning resurrection of Fritz Lang's futuristic fable *Metropolis* to its epic original cut, a version believed forever lost, began in a modest Buenos Aires cinema museum in the spring of 2008, when a rusted film can turned out to contain a 16mm negative of the entire 150-minute silent film. The discovery was reported worldwide as a delightful accident, a fantastic fluke, a feel-good story for the global media.

It also isn't entirely true.

During a trip to Argentina later that year, I met the duo responsible for unearthing the only extant copy of Lang's original opus and learned from Paula Félix-Didier and Fernando Peña the actual story. The recovery of the original *Metropolis* and its eventual restoration—after a 20-year pursuit—represents one of the greatest contributions any cinephile has made to the history of motion pictures.

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Underwritten by **McRoskey Mattress Company** and the **Film Noir Foundation**

Fritz Lang premiered his monumental science-fiction epic in Berlin on January 10, 1927. The making of the film had consumed 310 days, 60 nights, 37,000 extras, and more than five million marks. Berlin's leading figures in politics, society, art, and literature lauded the film with spontaneous ovations during the screening and demanded numerous curtain calls for Lang and his star Brigitte Helm, who would later call the film's production "the worst experience I ever had." Lang's demonic perfectionism had left no detail unrealized, and no collaborator's psyche unscarred.

That night, Lang knew that he was the most important film artist in the world, and that he had created the most ambitious and visually stupendous motion picture of all time. The glow of triumph lasted little more than two months.

In March 1927, Ludwig Klitzsch, right-hand man of communications magnate Alfred Hugenberg (later a minister in the Third Reich), took over operational control of Ufa, the studio that had leveraged its future to produce *Metropolis*. In creative terms, Ufa was years ahead of Hollywood as the center of international filmmaking, but Lang's budget overruns, coupled with a downturn in German box office receipts, had left the studio in dire financial straits. Klitzsch restructured the company, put workers on notice, slashed spending, and implemented strict production regulations.

In April, Alfred Hugenberg became Ufa's leading investor, shifting the studio's philosophy from the artistic to the commercial and its politics from

progressive to ultranationalistic. He was particularly annoyed that Lang's profligate spending had caused Ufa to fall behind in the development of talking pictures.

At a board meeting that spring, it was decided that *Metropolis*, after only ten weeks of public exhibition, would be pulled from German theaters and a few international markets and be recut. It had not yet been released in America; Ufa executives

worried not only about its length but also about "communist themes" that might alienate American audiences.

American acceptance of the film was crucial; in 1925, Ufa had entered into a co-distribution deal with Paramount, granting the American studio generous access to the German market in exchange for a huge loan—desperately needed to counter-



*A scene from Metropolis not seen since the film's original release, part of the lost footage discovered at the Museo del Cine in Buenos Aires*

act the financial woes wrought by *Metropolis*'s extravagant budget.

Paramount executives coveted the visionary film, but they also wanted it shortened. Playwright Channing Pollock was hired—at an extraordinary \$1,000 per day—to reconfigure *Metropolis* into a nine-reel film from the 16 reels that Lang delivered. Walter Wanger, who supervised Paramount's national theater chain and would eventually become partners with Lang in Hollywood, is reported to have said of Pollock's revision: "You did your best, but the damned picture is nothing but machinery."

The resulting American version, overanalyzed by critics but under-attended by the public, would



eventually emerge as Ufa's "official" version of the film. When it was reoffered to the German censor board on August 5, 1927, the film had been shrunk from two hours and thirty minutes to one hour and forty-seven. In the end, Ufa capitulated to its American partners and eviscerated its most grandiose achievement. "They had slashed my film so cruelly," Lang said, "that I dared not see it."

Bits and pieces of the original were found over the ensuing decades, always precipitating a re-release of the film in "the most complete version known to exist." There was no reason to believe that Lang's 150-minute version would ever be found.

In 1988, Fernando Peña was a teenage Buenos Aires cinephile, a protégé of Salvador Sammaritano, the Argentine film critic who had founded the nation's most influential film society. Sammaritano employed him to help catalog the film collection of the late Manuel Peña-Rodríguez, a major Argentine film critic and collector and Sammaritano's mentor.

While perusing the list of titles, Sammaritano suddenly said: "Ah, *Metropolis*! I won't ever forget that!" He explained to the young Peña that, at a film society screening in 1959, shrinkage of the original nitrate print caused a gap between the film and the gate, leaving the image slightly out of focus. To fix the problem, Sammaritano held his finger in the gate to steady the picture.

"He told me he was holding it there for two and a half hours," Peña recalled. Having seen several versions of *Metropolis*, all clocking under two hours, Peña questioned his mentor's memory. "Yes! Two and a half hours," Sammaritano declared. "I will always remember the length."

Peña's intuition kicked in. He studied microfiche of 1927 newspapers and discovered that the version of *Metropolis* that played in Buenos Aires came directly from Ufa, not Paramount, and that it was bought by an independent Argentine distributor in February 1927—six months before the recut American version replaced all international prints.

The entire Peña-Rodríguez collection, includ-

ing *Metropolis*, had by 1988 been donated to a government organization called Fondo Nacional de las Artes. Fernando Peña tried to gain access, to prove the existence of a complete *Metropolis*, but at every turn he was met with bureaucratic indifference. "The complete version of *Metropolis* would have appeared 20 years ago," Peña contends, "if it had been kept in a different place."

Over the ensuing years, Peña kept track of the collection's transfers among national, state, and municipal agencies. With each transfer, he attempted to gain access, to see the *Metropolis* footage for himself. He was continually denied until his ex-wife, Félix-Didier, was hired in April 2008 as director of the Museo del Cine—current home of the Peña-Rodríguez collection. "The staff was not happy to have somebody telling them they'd been sitting for 16 years on the Holy Grail," says Félix-Didier. "When Fernando came into the museum, it took only ten minutes: 'Here's the can.'" She laughs. "But those ten minutes were the culmination of a whole lifetime spent studying film history."

Once the discovery was made another saga began, one that included a \$250,000 offer from a French distributor who pleaded with Félix-Didier "not to give the film back to the Nazis." In the end, she shepherded *Metropolis* to the F.W. Murnau Institute, which funded and directed its restoration. "It's a German film," she says. "It makes sense for it to go back to Germany."

"I feel very strongly," Félix-Didier says, "that the best part is that our names will be forever linked with *Metropolis*, in a good way. It's not very often that film archives make it into the newspaper. And this was everywhere. I hope it inspires others to go through their collections and think, 'Maybe we should take a look in that unassuming film can.'"

—EDDIE MULLER

The complete interview with Félix-Didier and Peña appears in *Noir City Sentinel* Annual, #2, published by the Film Noir Foundation.



## THE BIG BUSINESS OF SHORT, FUNNY FILMS

Live Accompaniment by DENNIS JAMES on the Mighty Wurlitzer

**THE COOK** CAST: Roscoe "Fatty" Arbuckle (The Cook), Buster Keaton (The Pest Waiter), Al St. John (The Toughest Guy), Alice Lake (The Cashier), John Rand (The Proprietor), Bobby Dunn (The Dishwasher), Luke the Dog (Himself) PRODUCTION COMPANY: Comique Film Company 1918 PRODUCER: Joseph M. Schenck DIRECTOR: Roscoe Arbuckle PHOTOGRAPHER: George Peters EDITOR: Herbert Warren PRINT SOURCE: George Eastman House **PASS THE GRAVY** CAST: Max Davidson (Father), Martha Sleeper (Daughter), Spec O'Donnell (Ignatz), Bert Sprotte (Schultz), Gene Morgan (Schultz's Son) PRODUCTION COMPANY: Hal Roach Studios 1928 PRODUCER: Hal Roach DIRECTOR: Fred Guiol SUPERVISOR: Leo McCarey PHOTOGRAPHER: George Stevens EDITOR: Richard Currier TITLES: Reed Heustis PRINT SOURCE: George Eastman House **BIG BUSINESS** CAST: Stan Laurel (Stan), Oliver Hardy (Ollie), James Finlayson (Homeowner), Tiny Sandford (Policeman) PRODUCTION COMPANY: Hal Roach Studios 1929 PRODUCER: Hal Roach DIRECTOR: J. Wesley Home SUPERVISING DIRECTOR: Leo McCarey PHOTOGRAPHER: George Stevens EDITOR: Richard Currier TITLES: H.M. Walker PRINT SOURCE: Library of Congress

Short subjects dominated the first two decades of cinema history, remaining an important part of the moviegoing experience into the 1950s. Short films continue to be made, but they're usually seen in theaters only as a part of film festivals. For the past 30 years, general-release theatrical shorts have been limited to commercials and cartoons produced by Pixar, Disney, or Dreamworks to accompany one of their own animated features.

The last gasp of the theatrical short subject came in 1980, with *Supermarket Pink*, a Pink Panther cartoon. By then, even animated shorts were rare, Warner Bros. having ended its Looney Tunes series in 1969.

From the 1920s through the mid-1950s, feature films were accompanied by several short subjects, from comedies and travelogues to newsreels and educational films. Independent

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Support provided by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences



exhibitors assembled their own programs while theaters controlled by the major studios were provided a set package. These studio-packaged shows were outlawed by the same 1948 Supreme Court decision that forced the studios to sell off their theater chains. Short subjects moved from the theaters to television, in the form of half-hour and hour-long shows. As the sale of movie tickets declined, the majors combated the new medium by going big with widescreen formats, from Cinerama to Super-Panavision, and longer features. *The Ten Commandments* (1956) had a

runtime of 220 minutes and *Cleopatra* (1962) clocked in at 243 minutes. No time was left for theatrical short subjects. Some smaller studios gave up producing for theatrical release and aimed their product at television instead. Hal Roach Studios licensed its entire library for television broadcast in 1943, including its films featuring Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy. Roach also produced many original productions for TV, including *My Little Margie* and *The Abbott and Costello Show*.

*Pass the Gravy* came out of Hal Roach Studios, one of the most prolific producers of short films. The two-reel film features Max Davidson, a Berlin-born comedian whose trademark was a comic Jewish stereotype that was commonly accepted in the 1920s, although many would find it offensive today. The ethnic humor is muted in this short, which revolves around an urban chicken farm, a situation that was commonplace 80 years

ago when small farms dominated American agriculture.

*Big Business* also comes from Hal Roach Studios and features Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy. An English comedian who was once Charlie Chaplin's understudy, Laurel came to America in 1916. Hardy hailed from Georgia and made his first films in Jacksonville, Florida, in 1913. The two met while working for Hal Roach in 1925. Director Leo McCarey suggested the duo become an official comedy team after they appeared together in *The Second Hundred Years* (1927). James Finlayson,

their antagonist in *Big Business*, serves much the same function in 33 Laurel and Hardy films.

*The Cook* features Roscoe "Fatty" Arbuckle and Buster Keaton in a short made by Arbuckle's own production company. Arbuckle was at the height of his fame. Keaton started making films with and for Arbuckle in 1917. Both were accomplished vaudeville clowns with brilliant comic timing and the stamina to perform grueling and exact-



*The way to Fatty's heart: Roscoe "Fatty" Arbuckle flirts with Alice Lake in *The Cook*.*

ing stunts. *The Cook*, the last short the two made together, was considered lost until a deteriorated nitrate print was found in 1998 at the Norwegian Film Institute in Oslo. Sections are missing from the print, but the story still makes sense, and the broad physical comedy survives.

—RICHARD HILDRETH



## THE FLYING ACE

Live Piano Accompaniment by DONALD SOSIN

CAST: J. Lawrence Criner (Billy Stokes), Boise De Legge (Blair Kimball), Steve Reynolds (Peg), George Colvin (Thomas Sawtelle), Sam Jordan (Dr. Maynard), Harold Platts (Finley Tucker), Lyons Daniel (Jed Splivins), Kathryn Boyd (Ruth Sawtelle), Dr. R.L. Brown (Howard McAndrews) PRODUCTION: Norman Film Manufacturing Company 1926 PRODUCER: Richard Norman DIRECTOR: Richard Norman PRINT SOURCE: Norman Studios

African-Americans were not allowed to serve as pilots in the United States Armed Forces until 1940, but that didn't stop Richard Norman from making a black fighter pilot the hero of *The Flying Ace*. In this 1926 film, Captain Billy Stokes returns home victorious after World War I to resume his civilian career as a railroad detective—without removing his Army Air Service uniform, a constant reminder of his patriotism and valor.

During WWI, thousands of black Americans enlisted in segregated regiments, though many more were restricted to work as laborers and quartermasters. Black leaders hoped that these

men's willingness to serve their country would prove to white America that the time had come for equal rights. But when the soldiers returned, Jim Crow still reigned supreme and lynch mobs continued to terrorize the South. In an editorial in the NAACP's journal *The Crisis*, W.E.B. Dubois wrote, "Make way for democracy! We saved it in France, and by the great Jehovah, we will save it in the United States of America, or know the reason why."

Captain Billy Stokes is a model for the ideals of racial uplift, fulfilling aspirations that black Americans were not yet allowed to achieve. At a

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Underwritten by Wells Fargo



time when Hollywood employed white actors in blackface to play shuffling servants and mammies, the Norman Film Manufacturing Company, based in Jacksonville, Florida, hired all-black casts to play dignified roles. Instead of tackling discrimination head-on in his films, Norman created a kind of segregated dream world where whites—and consequently, racism—didn't even exist.

Richard Norman, a white man who grew up in Middleburg, Florida, began his business career as an inventor of soft drinks but, after a couple years, abandoned tonics for the movies. By the mid-'teens, Norman was traversing the Midwest making "Home Talent Pictures," which combined stock

footage with scenes of locals who later turned out and paid to see themselves on screen. In 1916, Norman made *The Green-eyed Monster*, a feature-length love story set on the American rails, but it wasn't until he remade it as *The Love Bug* in 1919 with an

all-black cast that he found himself with a modest hit. In 1920, he returned home to Florida and devoted himself to making what were known as "race movies," all-black films geared toward black audiences.

Before Norman arrived, Jacksonville had established itself as "The Winter Film Capital of the World." Unlike New York, where the movie industry was initially based, Jacksonville got plenty of sun all year long. It boasted lush landscapes and various styles of buildings that could serve as ready-made backdrops, and, in the early to mid-'teens, the city was home to around 30 film companies, including Selig Polyscope, Essanay, and Edison. By the time WWI broke out, the industry had begun its move west. When Norman came home to set up shop, he met little competition for Jacksonville's filmmaking resources. He bought

what had once been Eagle Studios and, from 1920 to 1928, made seven feature-length race films that he produced, directed, and distributed virtually single-handedly.

Norman was committed to portraying the strength and nobility of black America, but he also recognized that race films were good business. During the Great Migration in the early 20th century, thousands of black Americans had moved from the South to the North and from country to the city, where they constituted a significant block of new consumers. Norman estimated that urban movie theaters reached a black audience of three million, while ten million more saw movies in

segregated theaters, vaudeville, or at churches and schools. When these audiences looked to Hollywood to see themselves, they were disappointed. Black characters, if present at all, tended toward the stereotypes that film historian Donald Bogle



Kathryn Boyd and Lawrence Criner flank Steve Reynolds, who, despite missing a leg, performs amazing stunts in *The Flying Ace*.

summed up in the title of his 1973 book *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks*. Race movies like Norman's offered something new: a world where blacks overcome prejudice or, in films like *The Flying Ace*, never even encounter it.

Norman Films was part of what the film scholar Thomas Cripps has called the "black underground" of more than 100 companies making race movies in the 'teens and '20s well outside of Hollywood. (About half these companies were, like Norman Films, run by whites). But Norman's skill as a filmmaker and a businessman soon catapulted him to the top of the heap. Norman Films became one of the three leading producers of race films in America, along with the Lincoln Motion Picture Company and the Micheaux Film Corporation.

Oscar Micheaux and George and Noble Johnson, the heads of the Micheaux and Lincoln com-



panies, were black men who used cinema to confront American racism. Micheaux's *Within Our Gates* (1920)—a response to D.W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation*—included frank portrayals of whites raping and lynching blacks. The Lincoln Company's *The Realization of a Negro's Ambition* (1916) told the more hopeful story of a black man overcoming racial prejudice and becoming an oil baron.

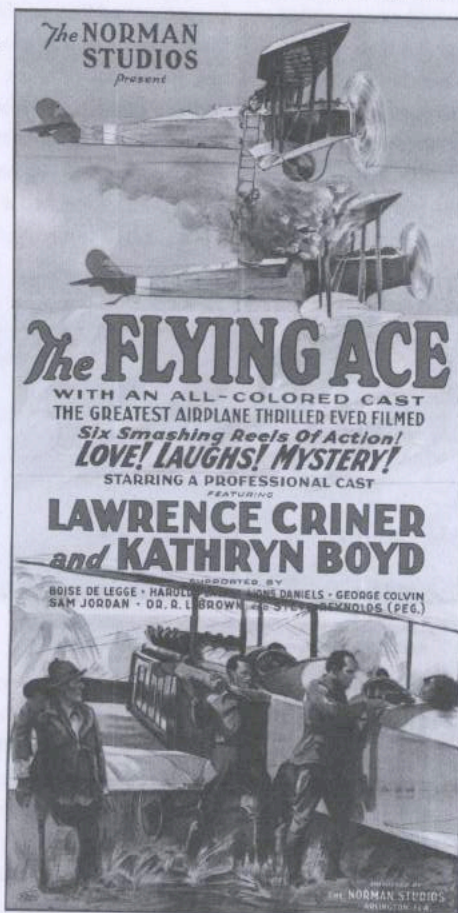
Norman and his competitors sometimes relied on each other to help distribute their films on the race film circuit, but Norman worried that explicitly political films would not sell. He once wrote that Micheaux, "due to the propaganda nature of his pictures and his business methods, seriously retarded the popularity" of all-black films. Norman instead made comedies, adventure stories, and romances, even mixing genres for maximum appeal. An advertisement for his 1920 film *The Bull-Dogger*, which starred champion black cowboy Bill Pickett, touted the "Death Defying Feats of Courage and Skill," and promised not just "Thrills!" but "Laughs too!" A poster for *The Flying Ace* called the film "The Greatest Airplane Thriller Ever Produced" and featured a drawing of a man parachuting from a burning plane.

*The Flying Ace* does not include any plane stunts, but Norman's initial hopes for the film were for more daredevilry, having previously contacted Bessie Coleman, "the world's first col[ored]

Flyer" and stunt flyer Captain Edison McEvey. When Norman finally made *The Flying Ace*, he cast J. Laurence Criner, a veteran of the Lafayette Players, Harlem's prestigious all-black theater troupe, as the lead. Criner didn't know how to pilot a plane, which probably ended up

saving Norman money and does not seem to have interfered with the film's success. *The Flying Ace* grossed more than \$20,000 on the race film circuit.

While it's impossible to measure the influence *The Flying Ace* had on its viewers, it is reasonable to assume that audiences found its lead character inspirational. Billy Stokes was a black male hero who would have never made it onscreen in a Hollywood movie of the time. Stokes sparked the imagination of at least one boy: Richard Norman Jr., who has fond memories of playing in the plane from *The Flying Ace* when he was young. "I used to dream about it," he said, "and my dreams came true."



The younger Norman eventually became a pilot. Today, he serves on the board of a Jacksonville nonprofit that plans to turn the Norman Studio buildings into a museum on Northeast Florida's rich history of silent film production. The Norman Studios Silent Film Museum will also include a learning center to teach the next generation of filmmakers to tell their own stories.

—MEGAN PUGH





## THE STRONG MAN

Live Piano Accompaniment by **STEPHEN HORNE**

CAST: Harry Langdon (Paul Bergot), Priscilla Bonner (Mary Brown), Gertrude Astor (Lily of Broadway), William V. Mong (Holy Joe), Robert McKim (Mike McDevitt), Arthur Thalasso (Zandow the Great) PRODUCTION: Harry Langdon Corporation, released by First National Pictures 1926 DIRECTOR: Frank Capra SCENARIO: Tim Whelan, Tay Garnett, James Langdon, Hal Conklin STORY: Arthur Ripley PHOTOGRAPHY: Elgin Lessley and Glenn Kershner PRODUCTION MANAGER: William H. Jenner ART DIRECTION: Lloyd Brierly ELECTRICAL EFFECTS: Denver Harmon ASSISTANT DIRECTOR: Clarence Hennecke, J. Frank Holliday TITLES: Reed Heustis EDITOR: Harold Young PRINT SOURCE: Photoplay, courtesy of Douris Films Ltd.

Harry Langdon's movie career peaked in 1926, the year two of his best films were released. He had come to Hollywood after nearly 30 years in vaudeville and refined his gently bumbling stage persona into a unique child-man character referred to as "The Little Elf." Having graduated from two-reel shorts to feature films in 1926, he was cited along with Chaplin, Keaton, and Lloyd as one of the kings of film comedy. By the end of the following year, however, critics began to voice dissatisfaction with Langdon's latest work,

which seemed, according to one contemporary reviewer, "seldom plausible and not often funny." He spent the rest of his career in relative obscurity.

Langdon first appeared onstage in 1896 at age 12 when he performed his own comedy routines at amateur shows in his hometown of Council Bluffs, Iowa. The following year, the stage-struck teen hit the road with a medicine show and began his apprenticeship as a clown, acrobat, singer, dancer, musician, impressionist, and ticket-taker. On the Midwestern theater

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circuits, he met singer Rose Mensolf, who became his partner onstage and off. They married in 1903 and developed a variety act of lively banter, pantomime, stage effects, and songs, which they polished over the next 20 years.

During this period, Langdon crafted his Little Elf character, with his baggy pants, floppy tie, punched-in hat, and snug jacket that strained its enormous buttons. This clueless boob character, popular with vaudeville audiences, used a slow, wide-eyed double-take and Langdon's speechless eloquence later became the hallmark of his silent films, even as the slapdash pace of the two-reelers almost killed it. As one of the writers of Langdon's later shorts observed, "[T]he moment you tried to speed him up and make an ordinary two-reel comic out of him, you were dead. He wasn't funny unless he could pace himself."

By 1911, the Langdons were headlining in vaudeville and, by 1923, earning \$1,500 a week. That same year, Harold Lloyd caught their act and recommended it to comedy mogul Mack Sennett, who decided that Harry had strong possibilities as a solo act. (Rose had little interest in making movies, and the team split privately as well as publicly; the Langdons divorced in 1929). The comic signed instead with Principal Distributing Corporation, making an unknown number of comedy shorts during the second half of 1923, none of which were released. Sennett

bought out Langdon's contract, and his two most ambitious writers, Frank Capra and Arthur Ripley, joined director Harry Edwards to create some of Langdon's best work.

In September 1925, the sought-after, highly paid Langdon signed a deal with First National that would allow the newly formed Harry Langdon Corporation full creative control to produce feature



A typical moment for Harry Langdon's "Little Elf"—awaiting the arrival of mayhem

films at the Burbank studio. He brought Edwards, Capra, and Ripley with him, and together they began their first feature. *Tramp Tramp Tramp* (1926) was a hit with public and critics alike, but ran \$50,000 over its \$250,000 budget. Although Langdon's growing entourage was the likely source of the overage, Harry Edwards took the blame. "Having guided Langdon from a frightened little actor to a star owning his own company," Frank Capra later wrote in his autobiography, *The Name Above the Title*, "Edwards couldn't take Langdon's present approval or disapproval of his every move. He bowed out of the second feature film, suggesting to Langdon

that I become his director." Whatever hard feelings followed the dismissal, they didn't last. Edwards acted as Langdon's best man when he remarried in 1929, and they collaborated on shorts for Paramount and Columbia in the 1930s and early 1940s.

For Langdon's second feature *The Strong Man* (1926), Capra inserted elements of his own story



to make his mark on the popular screen persona. The protagonist is a gullible immigrant in a heartless, corrupt new world where he's always searching for the ideal girl whose image has brought him thus far. He's seduced and swindled until he arrives at what biographer Joseph McBride describes as "the archetypal American small town, Cloverdale (read: Hollywood) ... [I]t seems more like a Frank Capra film than a Harry Langdon film." While *The Strong Man* did not make as much money as *Tramp Tramp Tramp*, critics elevated Langdon to the ranks of Chaplin, Keaton, and Lloyd. *Photoplay* raved, "Ask Harold Lloyd who gives him the biggest celluloid laugh. Ask any star. They will all say Langdon. Now he's the comic idol of Hollywood!"

*Long Pants* (1927) began production under a cloud. When Ripley disagreed with Capra's proposed

opening scenes showing Langdon's character as a child, Langdon sided with Ripley. While Capra insisted that the character remain on "the narrow beam of his range," Langdon believed that the cruel absurdities of life were the stuff of comic gold. "Harry was emotionally and artistically more compatible with Ripley's darker view of the comic universe," said one writer. Amid numerous delays and production overruns, the disagreement became an impasse. Finally, Ripley and Langdon took over the editing, while Capra, whose career had advanced with the Little Elf character that he'd helped to refine, began referring to Langdon as "the little bastard." A week before *Long Pants* was delivered to the distributor, Capra was fired, to his enduring rancor. In his memoirs, he alleged that Langdon threw frequent tantrums during the shooting of *Long Pants*: "Pathos,' he'd scream at me, 'I want to do more pathos.' ... The virus of conceit—alias, the fat head—hit Langdon hard."

Following tepid critical and popular response

to *Long Pants*, Langdon announced in *Variety* that he would direct all his forthcoming films. Capra responded with a scabrous letter, which he distributed to trade papers and movie columnists. The vendetta was not made public until five years later when "What Happened to Harry Langdon" appeared in *Photoplay*. "The news was flung all over the world that Langdon was impossible on the set and dabbled in everything. Other writers picked up the story. Almost every newspaper carried it and it gathered power as it went spinning into the world. Movie fans saw it, but more important, it was read by producers."



*Zandow the Great* (Arthur Thalasso) rests before his big debut, as Paul Bergot (Harry Langdon) prepares in his own way...

Rumor morphed into accepted fact: Harry Langdon, on top of the world in 1926, was considered a has-been just a few short years later. The truth lies somewhere in between. Harry Langdon

continued working, onstage and in films, for the rest of his life. He directed and starred in three features before First National shuttered his production company in 1928. The closure could be blamed on poor critical and popular reception of his work and on audiences' perception that the Little Elf character was growing darker and slightly more perverse. Between 1929 and his death in 1944, Langdon appeared in 16 feature films and at least 45 two-reelers. He contributed jokes to Hal Roach productions at United Artists and RKO, including four Laurel and Hardy shorts. He also made occasional personal appearances and gave interviews that made it plain that he had simply exited the pressure cooker: "All this business of being a big shot—I've found it really doesn't mean much after all. I've seen all the Hollywood parties and nightlife I want to see. What I want now is a fireplace, a wife, and my police dog. Contentment means much more to me than money."

—ROBERTO LANDAZURI



## DIARY OF A LOST GIRL

**Live Accompaniment by MONT ALTO MOTION PICTURE ORCHESTRA**

CAST: Louise Brooks (Thymian), André Roanne (Count Nicolas Osdorff), Josef Rovensky (Robert Henning), Fritz Rasp (Meinert), Vera Pawlowa (Aunt Frieda), Franziska Kinz (Meta), Arnold Korff (Elder Count Osdorff), Andrews Engelmann (Director of the Reform School), Valeska Gert (Director's Wife), Sybille Schmitz (Elizabeth), Siegfried Arno (Guest), Kurt Gerron (Dr. Vitalis), Speedy Schlichter, Emmi Wyda, Jaro Fürth, Hans Casparius PRODUCTION: Pabst-Film 1929 PRODUCER: Georg Wilhelm Pabst DIRECTOR: Georg Wilhelm Pabst SCENARIO: Rudolf Leonhardt, based on Margarete Böhme's novel *The Diary of a Lost One* PHOTOGRAPHY: Sepp Allgeier PRINT SOURCE: Kino International

"At the Eden Hotel, where I lived in Berlin," recalled Louise Brooks in her memoir *Lulu in Hollywood*, "the café bar was lined with the higher-priced trollops. The economy girls walked the street outside. On the corner stood the girls in boots, advertising flagellation. Actors' agents pimped for the ladies in luxury apartments in the Bavarian Quarter. Race-track touts at the Hoppegarten arranged orgies for groups of sportsmen. The nightclub Eldorado displayed an enticing line of homosexuals dressed as women. At the Maly, there was a choice of feminine or collar-and-tie lesbians." Clearly, Miss Brooks was not in

her native Kansas any more.

Louise Brooks arrived in Berlin on October 14, 1928, to play Lulu in G.W. Pabst's production of *Pandora's Box* (1929). Pabst had scoured Germany looking for the perfect actress, shocking the country when he chose an American for the iconic role. In Brooks Pabst recognized "the naturally erotic, yet tantalizingly innocent allure" that characterized the fatally seductive Lulu. Up until that point, Brooks had enjoyed reasonable success in Hollywood, playing supporting roles in mid-budget films such as *The American Venus* (1926) and *Love 'Em and Leave 'Em* (1926).



While Colleen Moore and Clara Bow defined the fun-loving Jazz Age flapper in films such as *Flaming Youth* (1923) and *It* (1927), Brooks did not capture the public's imagination to the same extent. She had appeared in 14 feature films since her uncredited debut in *The Street of Forgotten Men* (1925) but never was defined as a "type" by studio publicity departments. In addition to a miscellany of minor roles, Brooks appeared as a gangster moll, flapper, the girl-next-door, an acrobat, cabaret performer, and fugitive, never achieving A-list status in Hollywood. Even when playing a major role as in William Wellman's *Beggars of Life* (1928), she received lesser billing than the leading men.

Brooks arrived in Berlin ten years after the Armistice ended World War I. Germany's defeat had sparked political revolution and financial collapse, along with a cultural upheaval that overturned social norms and inspired artistic expression. Disillusioned artists used their respec-

tive mediums to reject the traditions of prewar imperial Germany. Paul Klee, Max Ernst, and Otto Dix pushed the boundaries of visual arts, while novelists Herman Hesse, Franz Kafka, and Thomas Mann plumbed the German soul. On the stage, Bertolt Brecht exposed the hypocrisy of conventional morality in *The Threepenny Opera*.

In cinema, Expressionism and avant-garde experimentation held sway during the first half of the 1920s. Robert Wiene's geometrically daring settings and stylized characterizations in the groundbreaking *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920) challenged the boundaries of perception and re-

ality. Germany's most important directors followed suit, using the camera to express their characters' psychological states. G.W. Pabst took a new direction, introducing *die neue sachlichkeit* (the new reality) into German cinema. His *The Joyless Street* (1925), in which Greta Garbo and Asta Nielsen face prostitution as a necessity of survival, depicted contemporary social conditions and human sexuality in a direct and nonjudgmental way.

While artists were shattering old boundaries of expression, social conventions also came under assault. In casting off stuffy imperial Germany, traditional notions of sexual morality gave

way to more open attitudes toward sex and social culture, in particular toward women. Historian Eric Weitz describes Berlin's "New Woman," as "wearing short hair ... slender, athletic, erotic, and amaterial—she smoked ... went out alone, and had sex as she pleased." Louise Brooks, as both an actress and persona, epitomized the prototype.



Berlin's "New Women," wearing short hair... slender, athletic, erotic, and amaterial...

During the 1920s, Berlin became a magnet for the young and the ambitious. Between 1900 and 1920, the population more than doubled to 4.2 million, making it the second largest city in Europe and rivaling Paris and London as a cultural center. Inspired by a new licentiousness in books, lectures, magazines, and movies, Berlin's glittering cabaret and nightclub scene catered to every taste and persuasion. The most extravagant erotic revues could be found at Haller-Revue, while the Adonis-Lounge welcomed "wild boys" and "sugar lickers," and the Cabaret of the Nameless featured amateur onstage performances. Population rolls

recorded 30,000 registered prostitutes, a figure that excludes male prostitutes and women who engaged in sex work unofficially.

Not all Germany approved of the sexual revolution. Conservatives across the country, especially the Protestant and Catholic churches, stridently opposed open attitudes toward sex, especially as it related to female emancipation. That women could determine their own lives, choose their sex partners, and decide whether or not to marry seemed indicative of all that was wrong with German life and presaged the downfall of the Weimar Republic. To combat what they perceived as the era's moral failings, conservative groups called for the censorship of popular media in general and cinema in particular, targeting G.W. Pabst's *The Joyless Street*, which was heavily cut by German censors.

In 1928, Pabst filmed *Pandora's Box*, adapted from two plays by Frank Wedekind. With Louise Brooks as the alluring temptress

Lulu, Pabst's depiction and graphic use of sexual themes provoked moral indignation and was frequently considered too explicit by local censors who often cut or even banned the film. The outrage that greeted *Pandora's Box* did not deter Pabst, however, who established his own production company and undertook an even more provocative subject. In *Diary of a Lost Girl*, Pabst further explored bourgeois hypocrisy and sexual freedom, with Louise Brooks once again portraying his heroine. In the film, Pabst used the main character Thymian, who opts for alienation rather than hypocritical conformity, as a vehicle to attack the self-righteous values of the German middle class. Like *Pandora's Box*, *Diary of a Lost Girl* was ruthlessly attacked by the press and censors, ultimately requiring Pabst to film an alternate ending

for German audiences.

While well-known and popular with audiences today, the two Pabst films starring Brooks had little impact on their own era. Both were released after *The Jazz Singer* (1927), which marked the dawn of talkies, and suffered the additional liability of being heavily censored at home and abroad. Seemingly irrelevant at the time, *Diary of a Lost Girl* was never even released in the United States. Louise Brooks made one last film in Europe, *Prix de beauté* (1930), filmed in Paris as a silent and later dubbed in French prior to its release. Returning to America, the actress was ignored by the studios, which cast her in a handful of forget-

table low-budget shorts and westerns over the next eight years. Her final screen appearance was in *Overland Stage Raiders* (1938), primarily notable for its emerging star, John Wayne.

Pabst went on to create important films in the early sound era, including *Westfront 1918* (1930), *The Threepenny Opera*

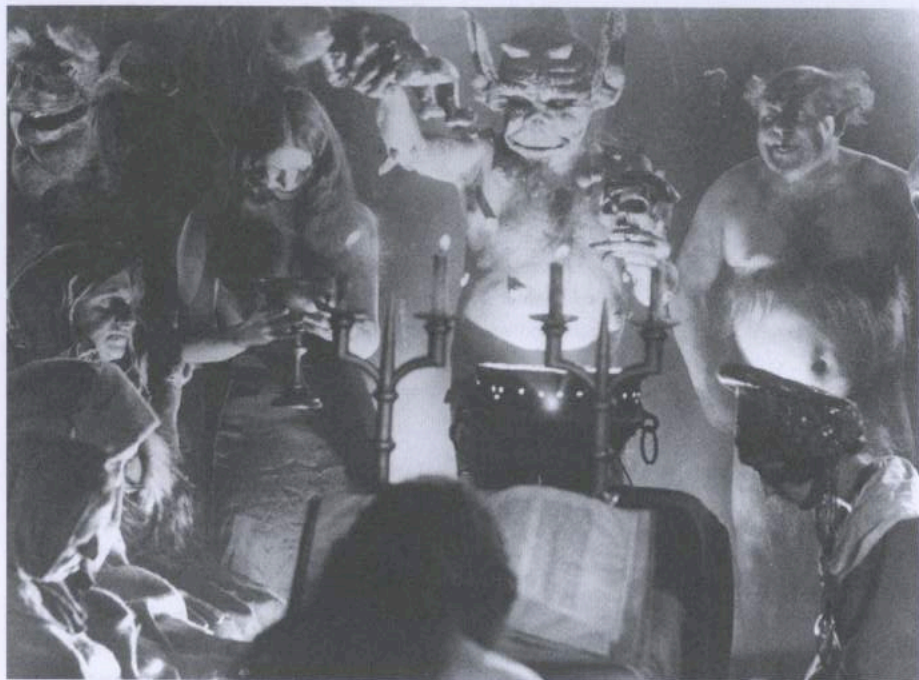
(1931), and *Comradeship* (1931). In 1933 he directed *A Modern Hero* (1934) in Hollywood, and later made several films in France, including *Mademoiselle Docteur* (1937) and *Le drame de Shanghai* (*The Shanghai Drama*, 1938). Pabst returned to his native Austria in 1939, directing three wartime films, including *Komodianten* (1942), which was awarded a gold medal at the Fascist-controlled Venice Film Festival. Though Pabst continued to direct until 1956, film scholar Lee Atwell concludes, "Never again was Pabst able to achieve such a powerfully cynical view of the society ... and no director during the silent period equaled his ability to create scenes of sustained erotic intensity that appeal to our aesthetic sense as well as our innermost desires."

—ROBERT BYRNE



Sally Blane, Louise Brooks, and Nancy Phillips, three of Paramount's promising Junior stars in 1927





# HÄXAN: Witchcraft Through the Ages

Live Accompaniment by MATTI BYE ENSEMBLE

CAST: Benjamin Christensen (The Devil), Astrid Holm (Anna), Elisabeth Christensen (Anna's Mother), Karen Winther (Anna's Younger Sister), Maren Pedersen (Maria the Weaver, a witch), Ella la Cour (Karna, a sorceress), Emmy Schanfeld (Karna's Assistant), Kate Fabian (Lovesick Girl), Oscar Stribolt (Monk), Clara Pontoppidan (Nun), Else Vermehren (Nun), Alice O'Fredericks (Nun), Johannes Andersen (Fader Henrik, Witch Judge), Elith Pio (Johannes, Witch Judge), Aage Hertel (Witch Judge), Ib Schønberg (Witch Judge), Frederik Christensen, Henry Seemann, Knud Rasmussen, Holst Jørgensen, Poul Reumert (Jeweler), H.C. Nielsen (Jeweler's Assistant), Tora Teje (The Hysteric), Albrecht Schmidt (Psychiatrist), Ellen Rasmussen (Maid) PRODUCTION: Svenska Biografteatern 1922 DIRECTOR: Benjamin Christensen SCENARIO: Benjamin Christensen PHOTOGRAPHY: Johan Ankerstjerne PRODUCTION DESIGN: Richard Louw EDITOR: Edla Hansen PRINT SOURCE: Swedish Film Institute

The 1910s were Danish cinema's Golden Age. In this decade Denmark produced an explosion of erotic melodramas for international export, the first films written by Carl Theodor Dreyer, and movies featuring cinema's first superstar, Asta Nielsen. The first Danish film to make an international splash was 1910's *Den hvide Slavenhandel* (*The White Slave Traffic*), a sensational thriller in which a young woman is kidnapped

and forced into prostitution. As film historian Marguerite Engberg reports, the film was so popular in Denmark that police had to be called to control theater crowds.

The film launched a global frenzy for white slave films, including the notorious 1913 American release *Traffic in Souls*, which also required police intervention when it was shown in New York. In 1910, the young Nielsen starred in her

first film: *Afrunden (The Woman Always Pays)*, as a woman who runs off with a circus performer, performing a suggestive "couch" dance after tying him up. Nielsen became a star and Danish studios began mass producing erotic melodramas for export. The film also inspired the 30-year-old Benjamin Christensen to pursue filmmaking.

Born in 1879 in Viborg, Denmark, Christensen abandoned his medical studies in Copenhagen to study as an opera singer at the Royal Theater. After his voice failed, he turned to acting and was soon performing in and directing plays at the City Theater in Aarhus and later for Copenhagen's prestigious National Theater. When his voice failed him again, he became the Danish representative to a French champagne company in 1907.

Like many at the time, Christensen didn't consider film to be an artistic medium. One day, however, he stumbled across the film shoot where Nielsen was performing the dramatic final scene of *The Woman Always Pays*. The next

year, he joined Dansk Biografkompagni as an actor, but was frustrated with the poor technical quality and limited ambitions of its films. In 1913, the president of the company resigned and Christensen assumed his post. Inspired by Albert Capellani's *Les misérables* (1913), he resolved to produce, write, direct, and star in an ambitious film intended to transform the Danish film industry. Whereas most Danish films of this time were made in a few weeks, he spent three months and quadruple the usual budget. The resulting espionage thriller, *Det hemmelighedsfulde X (The Mysterious X, 1914)*, was a tremendous success

in Denmark and abroad. A *Moving Picture World* critic wrote: "An extraordinary boldness of invention joined with a mastery of detail that approaches genius help to make this feature rise above all which has been filmed before."

After turning down a contract with the American company Vitagraph, Christensen directed and starred in another successful film, *Hævens nat (Increasing Night, 1916)*, about the vengeance sought by a wrongfully convicted man. It took eight months to make and was one of the most expensive Danish films to date. In the U.S., the

film played at upscale New York movie palaces with full orchestras and for convicts at Sing Sing prison.

To finance his next and most ambitious picture, Christensen looked to Svensk Filmindustri. Sweden was in the midst of its own Golden Age, with directors such as Victor Sjöström and Mauritz Stiller winning international praise for their artistic productions. Christensen aspired to this same artistry but wanted to overturn tra-



Director Benjamin Christensen plays the devil in his own film.

ditional narrative structure. "I would like to know at this time whether a film is able to hold the public's interest without mass effects," he wrote, "without sentimentality, without unified narration, without suspense, without heroes and heroines—in short, without all those things on which a good film is otherwise constructed." He decided to create a trilogy about superstition throughout history, starting with *Häxan*. (The next two installments, *The Saint* and *The Spirits*, were never made.) From 1918 until 1921, he researched and prepared for the film. Shooting began in February or March 1921 and lasted through October. Accord-



ing to film historian Casper Tybjerg, Christensen, who plays the devil in the film, "worked at his own pace, often at night, and scandalous rumors circulated about what went on when the studio doors were closed."

As in his previous films, Christensen invented techniques to bring his aesthetic vision to the screen. For the spectacular scene of witches flying over the countryside, the director was dissatisfied with shooting from a moving train. Instead, his technicians constructed an enormous model town on a giant carousel, which held more than 250 houses, each about six feet high. The carousel was turned by 20 men. The witches (more than 75) were filmed separately by a moving camera that tracked past them as an airplane engine generated wind. These shots, according to Tybjerg, were combined "using an experimental optical printer designed by Christensen's cameraman."

Finally released in September 1922, *Häxan* cost between 1.5 and 2 million Swedish kroner, making it the most expensive Scandinavian film of the silent period. Its depictions of feverish

nuns and demonic orgies met censorship everywhere it was released, preventing Svensk Filmindustri from recouping its costs. Despite the film's success with Danish audiences, Christensen was forced out of the Scandinavian film industry with a damaging reputation for extravagance.

The chastened Christensen directed two films in Germany and starred as the artist destroyed by his male protégé's infidelity in Carl Theodor Dreyer's *Mikael* (1924). Christensen's performance was universally praised; one Berlin newspaper wrote that "his death scene belongs among the very few great masterpieces of the art of film acting."

In 1925, Christensen signed with MGM. (After seeing *Häxan*, Louis B. Mayer had reportedly asked Victor Sjöström, "Is that man crazy or

a genius?") He joined Hollywood's "Scandinavian colony" but bristled under the studio's factory approach to filmmaking, eventually leaving for First National, where he made four low-budget films in a year and a half.

He returned to Denmark in 1935 and made four talkies for Nordisk. The first three were well-received, addressing themes such as divorce and abortion. He then spent a year working on his pet project, a new espionage thriller. However, the 1942 film *Damen med de lyse Handsker* (*The Lady with the Light Gloves*) was out of touch with the sentiment in Nazi-occupied Denmark. According to film scholar Arne Lunde, the Copenhagen premiere was "met with disbelief and derisive laughter."



Johan Ankerstjerne's superb camerawork frames Christensen's nightmarish tableaux to perfection.

Two years later, Christensen tried to find financing for a new film, with no success. The government offered him a pension running a small cinema in the suburbs of Copenhagen, which he did for 15 years until his death in 1959.

For a long time *Häxan* was difficult to see. In 1968, British filmmaker and distributor Antony Balach re-edited the film and added

narration by William S. Burroughs and a jazz score by percussionist Daniel Humair and featuring Jean-Luc Ponty on violin. It circulated under the title *Witchcraft Through the Ages*. In 2007, the Swedish Film Institute struck a new print of *Häxan* from the original camera negative, recreating the tinting and toning as well as the intertitles, which had been lost. Looking back at his early career, Christensen said, "While the sound film has freed us from the silent film's often irritating approximation in expression, it has at the same time slain something in the dream, the lyricism that, in the more fortunate moments, radiate from the silent film."

—LAURA HORAK



## THE SHAKEDOWN

Live Piano Accompaniment by DONALD SOSIN

CAST: James Murray (Dave Roberts), Barbara Kent (Marjorie), George Kotsonaros (Battling Roff), Wheeler Oakman (Manager), Jack Hanlon (Clem), Harry Gribbon (Dugan) PRODUCTION: Universal 1929 DIRECTOR: William Wyler SCENARIO: Charles A. Logue ORIGINAL STORY: Clarence J. Marks TITLES: Albert de Mond PHOTOGRAPHY: Charles Stumar, Jerome Ash EDITING: Lloyd Nosler, Richard Cahoon PRINT SOURCE: George Eastman House, courtesy of Universal

"Each boxing match is a story," Joyce Carol Oates wrote about the enduring appeal of the centuries-old blood sport. "A highly condensed, highly dramatic story ...." Long a popular subject for writers, from Homer to Colette, these compact dramas also drew the attention of cinema's pioneers who sought to profit from filming important bouts for a wider public. The earliest films used boxing images in their experiments—Edison's gloved lab assistants going at it mano-a-mano for the Kinetograph in 1892 and Max Skladanowsky pitting a man against a kangaroo for his Bioskop in 1895. But it was W.K.L. Dickson who

conjured the future when he wrote in a letter to soon-to-be business partner Henry N. Marvin about "...the possibility of some small simple device which could be made to show cheaply the final punch and knockout of a prizefight." The sport of boxing has been bound to the movies ever since.

Translating easily into slapstick, boxing situations were frequently featured in comedies. Chaplin played referee to Fatty Arbuckle's "Pug" in 1914's *The Knockout*. An effete Buster Keaton put on the gloves for 1926's *Battling Butler* in order to prove his manliness to his fiancée's macho

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father. The avant-garde also embraced pugilism: *Entr'acte* (1924) begins with two white gloves boxing against a black background and *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City* (1927) juxtaposes images of the fights with dance clubs in a sequence on the city's nightlife. Drama, however, asserted the most tenacious claim on the prizefighter, his rise and fall tailor-made to Hollywood's melodramatic tendencies. D.W. Griffith's *Broken Blossoms* (1919) centered around the daughter of the brutal over-the-hill boxer Battling Burrows; Alfred Hitchcock captured the comedies and tragedies of a carnival prizefighter turned gentleman sparring partner in *The Ring* (1927); and future film director John Huston, who in his youth had "boxed for small purses," played a small role in William Wyler's *The Shakedown*.

Wyler, nominated for 12 best director Oscars and winner of three, made almost every type of film in his 45-year career. He began cranking out two-reel westerns and went on to make some memorable features of the genre, including *Hell's Heroes* (1930) and *The Westerner* (1940). He directed the social-issue film *Dead End* (1937), which led to legislation to clean up New York City's slums, and his stripped-down noir *Detective Story* (1951) confronted middle-class hypocrisy. He collaborated

with playwright Lillian Hellman on five films and adapted classic and contemporary novels for 1939's *Wuthering Heights* and 1946's *The Best Years of Our Lives*. He worked with Gregg Toland on seven films, developing a complex mise-en-scène in conjunction with the cinematographer's distinctive deep focus photography. He helped refine the innate talent of Bette Davis in three of her starring roles and guided Audrey Hepburn to

her breakout performance in the romantic comedy *Roman Holiday* (1953). He directed MGM's remake of the rousing biblical epic *Ben-Hur*, and, toward the end of his career, when he could have rested on his substantial laurels, he agreed to direct Barbra Streisand's film debut *Funny Girl* (1968), because, he said, "I had never made a musical." *The Shakedown*, however, was one movie the young Wyler did not want to make.

Born July 1, 1902, in Mulhouse, Alsace, an 18-year-



old Wyler joined the ranks of Universal's many young relatives of studio head Carl Laemmle, cousin to Wyler's doting mother. After a couple years in odd jobs at the studio's New York headquarters, he made the move to Los Angeles and became errand boy for Irving Thalberg's office—"They'd send me out to buy cigars." Dubbed "Worthless Willy" when he failed to turn in a

synopsis for the German-language novel that Erich von Stroheim was interested in filming, he, however, proved useful on location of Universal's many western serials, moving up to herding extras and assistant directing. Just before his 23rd birthday, Wyler directed his first two-reeler, *Crook Busters* (1925). "Westerns were a great way to learn your trade," Wyler later recalled, "because they were action films and so you were dealing with movement, which is the fundamental ingredient of motion pictures. ... (I used to stay up nights, trying to think of new ways for the hero to get on and off a horse.)" After directing 21 two-reel and eight five-reel westerns, Wyler sought a promotion to Universal Jewel features, with their bigger budgets and bigger stars.

*The Girl Show*, based on Charles A. Logue's script *The Grappler* about a wrestler in an itinerant burlesque act, was to be Wyler's first non-western feature but, according to biographer Jan Herman, the project was delayed over casting issues. In the meantime, Wyler directed Bessie Love in *Anybody Here Seen Kelly?*, a comedy about a French woman who comes to the U.S. after the war to look for her soldier boyfriend. Given a budget of \$60,000, he traveled with cast and crew to New York City to film the exterior shots, which he did documentary-style, without permits or paid extras. He installed cameras in cars, taxi windows, and even a laundry pushcart to capture Mitzi's trek through the unfamiliar city and, in one scene, played a traffic cop at Broadway and 42nd, where he caused an actual traffic jam and got arrested. His bosses were pleased with the onscreen results. Wyler continued to balk at directing the wrestling picture, which, after being combined with a Damon Runyon script called *The Geezer* and re-titled, *The Frame-up*, now centered around a prizefighter. Universal's general manager Henry Henigson promised Wyler, "If you play ball, I will."

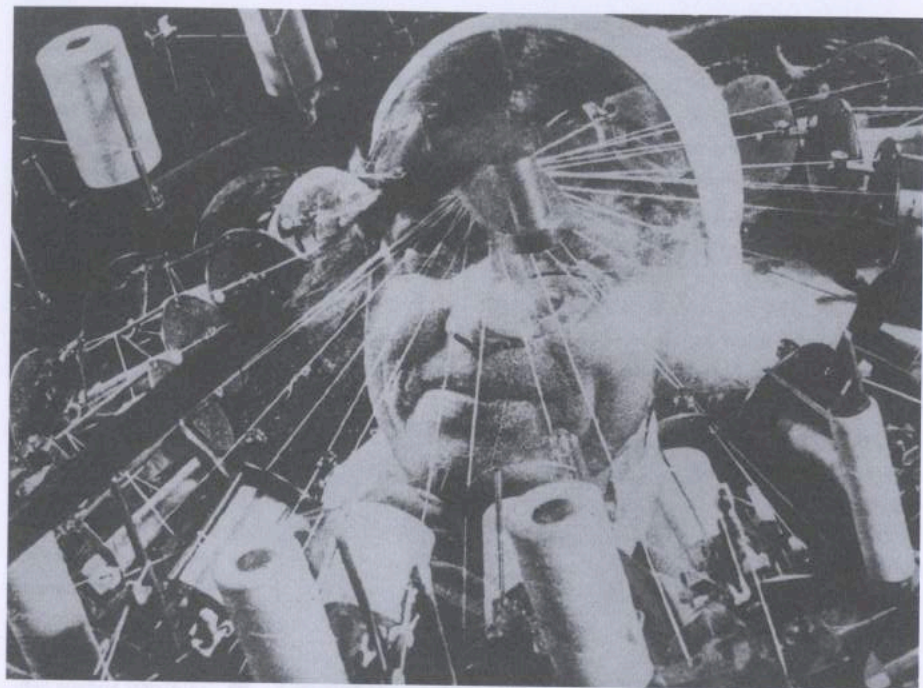
Made for \$50,000, *The Shakedown*, as it was finally called, was released as both a silent and a part-talkie. Wyler was now an up-and-coming director at Universal, the youngest on the lot, and

his name was used to promote the film—"Another Willie Wyler Winner." Next, he reluctantly agreed to direct *The Storm*, an outdoor adventure movie starring Lupe Vélez, only after the studio's new general manager, Carl Laemmle Jr., threatened to bust him back down to "programmers." In order to get his next assignment, the Laura LaPlante vehicle *The Love Trap* (1929), the studio screened *The Shakedown* for the valued star who had director approval. Wyler joined the projectionist in the booth, laughing up the funny scenes so she could hear. By the time he directed Universal's first all-talking picture *Hell's Heroes*, shot under grueling conditions in the Mojave, he was on solid ground at Universal for the industry's turbulent changeover.

Sound suited William Wyler. A theater lover since a boy, he easily adapted to the talkies, which began pulling its stories from the New York stage. He went on to accrue accolades from his Hollywood peers, even as they complained of his perfectionism as director. (He first earned the moniker "50-Take Wyler" on the set of 1933's *Counselor-at-Law*, starring the forgetful John Barrymore). He eventually left Universal for an eight-film collaboration with producer Sam Goldwyn and later earned two best director Oscars at MGM. Boxing achieved its own greatness in motion pictures. In heart-wrenching melodramas like King Vidor's *The Champ* (1931), classic film noirs like Robert Rossen's *Body and Soul* (1947), and modern masterworks like Martin Scorsese's *Raging Bull* (1980), the prizefight film went on to transcend its lowly origins as a mere profit-making genre to give cinema some of its most poignant and indelible characters.

—SHARI KIZIRIAN





# MAN WITH A MOVIE CAMERA

Live Accompaniment by ALLOY ORCHESTRA

CAST: Mikhail Kaufman (Man with a Movie Camera), Elizaveta Svilova (Editor) PRODUCTION: The All-Ukrainian Photo-Cine Directorate (VUFKU) 1929 DIRECTOR: Dziga Vertov ASSISTANT DIRECTOR and EDITOR: Elizaveta Svilova HEAD CAMERAMAN: Mikhail Kaufman  
PRINT SOURCE: Alloy Orchestra Collection

The spinning of a child's toy top or the whirl of a film strip running through the wheel of an editing table—differing legends explain the inspiration for David Kaufman to adopt the alias that history immortalized: Dziga Vertov. In the new Soviet state, the onomatopoeic *nom de plume* of the 22-year-old son of Jewish librarians represented a pioneering band of documentary filmmakers he called the *kinoks*, or "cinema eyes." By making films to stir the masses, they hoped to change the world, and their most ambitious visual manifesto was Vertov's final silent film, *Man with a Movie Camera*.

Vertov's polemical filmmaker persona has eclipsed more personal impressions of him. Before her death in 1976, his widow Elizaveta

Svilova wrote: "He was always bursting with plans and fantastic projects. One minute you might find him sitting on a windowsill explaining loudly to someone just why his style of shooting was totally wrong; the next minute he would retreat completely from the world and bury himself in an open book or manuscript. Then suddenly he would grab his things and be off—on a shoot, or off somewhere with a portable projector."

Born in 1896, David Kaufman grew up along with his two brothers, Mikhail and Boris, in Bialystok, Poland, then a largely Jewish city within the Russian Empire. He studied piano and violin at the Bialystok Music Conservatory in addition to his regular schooling, but later described himself as a distractible pupil, interested in learning about

everything but the task at hand. Instead, he wrote fantasy stories and poetry and founded a "Laboratory of Hearing," inspired by the Russian Futurists who used art to glorify the machine age. In one experiment, he arranged the sounds of a local sawmill into a composition of noise. In 1915, his family fled the German army's advance into Bialystok, moving to Russia proper. Kaufman briefly attended law and medical school in Moscow and Petrograd (now St. Petersburg), before securing a job editing newsreel for the Moscow Film Committee. In 1918, he changed his name and became the filmmaker we now remember.

Vertov's metamorphosis was inextricable from the massive upheaval and turbulence of revolutionary Russia. Even as a blockade made film-making materials from the West a scarce commodity, Vladimir Lenin declared to Soviet culture minister Anatoly Lunacharsky

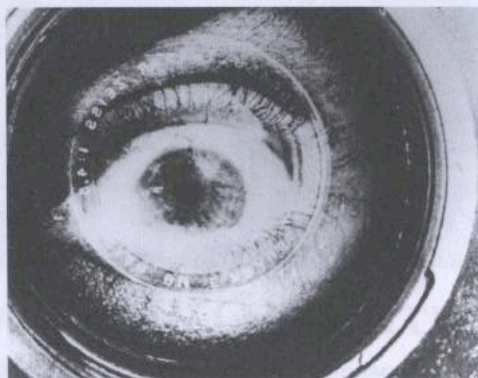
that cinema was "the most important of the arts." Newsreels were crucial in relaying information and propaganda to Soviet citizens, both peasants in the countryside and soldiers at the various fronts. Trains carried the latest edition of Vertov's *Film-Weekly* series to remote locations, along with cameramen charged with capturing images for future editions.

The brief *Film-Weekly* segments resembled Gaumont or Pathé newsreels in style. Vertov creatively compiled the most compelling sequences into feature-length documentaries. *The Battle of Tsaritsyn* (1920) was his first film with footage shot under his supervision. He could find no one willing to edit it to his unusual specifications, until Svilova, a Moscow Film Committee colleague, offered help. She became Vertov's lifelong editor and, in 1923, his wife. She joined Vertov and his

cameraman brother Mikhail Kaufman as the "Council of Three" responsible for the *kinoks'* gathering of images for Vertov's *Kino-Pravda* newsreels (1922–1925), which incorporated animation, quick-cutting, reverse-motion, and other techniques previously unseen in documentary. The *kinoks* also became preoccupied with finding ways to film people without their reaction to their camera registering in the shot.

In the mid-1920s, Soviet Russia achieved recognition from foreign powers, and the film industry no longer had to scramble for supplies. A new generation of Soviet directors, Sergei Eisen-

stein, Esther Shub, Aleksandr Dovzhenko, Vsevolod Pudovkin, and Vertov, competed under a new system, dependent on financial resources channeled through new, state-controlled studios like Sovkino and VUFKU. As Soviet pictures attracted international attention and prospered at the domestic box of-



"I am kino-eye, I am a mechanical eye. I, a machine, show you the world as only I can see it."—Dziga Vertov, 1923

fice, Vertov became increasingly isolated, clinging tenaciously to a cinema free of any literary or theatrical influences. In early 1927, after calculating over-expenditures on Vertov's latest film, *A Sixth Part of the World* (1926), Sovkino studio gave the director three days to provide a written scenario for his next undertaking, *Man with a Movie Camera*. He refused and was dismissed, ultimately bringing his project to the less prestigious Ukrainian film company VUFKU.

*Man with a Movie Camera* was intended as a visual argument for the place of the documentary filmmaker as a worker, educator, and eyewitness in a proletariat society. The film is an impressionistic view of urban daily life, seen from a purely cinematic perspective. Mikhail Kaufman played the title role, carrying a lightweight camera up the highest rooftops and smokestacks as well as



deep into factories and mines to capture extraordinary images. According to scholar Yuri Tsivian, Kaufman thought of himself as "the Buster Keaton of documentary filmmaking." He determined the camera setups and used no stunt doubles; *Man with a Movie Camera* was as much his own as his brother's feat. When the duo disagreed, however, Vertov always won out, creating a rift between the pair. In reaction to *Man with a Movie Camera*, Kaufman directed *In Spring* (1930), which used thawing winter as a metaphor for revolution and rejected Vertov's elaborate editing effects. The brothers never collaborated again.

The Kiev and Moscow premieres of *Man with a Movie Camera* employed orchestras, using Vertov's detailed cues for musical themes, instrumentation, and tempo changes. After a brief theatrical run, the documentary became scarce within the Soviet Union. Its fast fade has generally been attributed to a policy shift under Josef Stalin.

Artistic formalism was

discouraged as an era of social realism took hold. Vertov's next films, *Enthusiasm* (1931) and *Three Songs of Lenin* (1934), gracefully applied his experimental montage approach to soundtrack in addition to image. Both films received praise in the U.S.S.R. and abroad. In 1935, Vertov received the Order of the Red Star but, by mid-decade, his filmmaking was no longer deemed worthy of state support. He wrote of his predicament, "You want to go on working in poetic documentary? All right. In broad terms, we shall allow you to do so. But

we cannot put you in the same competitive conditions as other directors." The remainder of his career was marked by less experimentation and diminishing control over his work.

Since Vertov's death in 1954, both his films and his writings have become increasingly available. Modest about her own contributions to his achievements, Elizaveta Svilova became a strong promoter of her husband's legacy, arranging for his writings to be published in several languages

and his films to be distributed. Dozens of books and hundreds of scholarly articles have been published on the works he left behind. Retrospectives and screenings have proliferated worldwide. In 1995, le Giornate del Cinema Muto (Pordenone Silent Film Festival) commissioned the Alloy Orchestra to compose a modern score based on Vertov's musical instructions for *Man with a Movie Camera*, and, in 2009, a new touring print was struck at the Moscow Film Archive.

The legacy of Vertov extends much further



"You can never step into the same river twice nor, given its exhilarating tempo, can you see the same *Man with a Movie Camera*."

—J. Hoberman

than this single extraordinary film—into the very way we think and talk about cinema. In 1961, French documentarians Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin borrowed Vertov's term *kino-pravda* when creating a now widespread style of nonfiction filmmaking that we've called *cinéma vérité* ever since.

—BRIAN DARR



## THE WOMAN DISPUTED

Live Piano Accompaniment by STEPHEN HORNE

CAST: Norma Talmadge (Mary Ann Wagner), Gilbert Roland (Paul Hartman), Arnold Kent (Nika Turgenov), Boris de Fast (Passerby), Michael Vavitch (Father Roche), Gustav von Seyffertitz (Otto Krueger), Gladys Brockwell (Countess), Nicholas Soussanin (Count) PRODUCTION: Joseph M. Schenck Productions 1928 DIRECTORS: Henry King, Sam Taylor SCENARIO: C. Gardner Sullivan, from the play by Denison Clift, based on Guy de Maupassant's story "Boule de Sui" PHOTOGRAPHY: Oliver Marsh EDITOR: Hal Kern ART DIRECTION: William Cameron Menzies PRINT SOURCE: Library of Congress, courtesy of Douris Films Ltd.

"The thing that makes Talmadge a star is the look in her eyes," MGM studio head and star-maker Louis B. Mayer once said of actress Norma Talmadge. One of the most popular stars of the silents, her career ended after two poorly received talkies, and she is nearly forgotten today. If Talmadge is remembered at all, it is because of two iconic films of the 1950s. Both feature characters based on erroneous impressions of Talmadge: Lina Lamont, the silent screen star in *Singin' in the Rain* (1952) whose screechy voice ends her career when sound arrives; and Norma Desmond, the faded diva of *Sunset Boulevard*

(1950), driven mad with dreams of a glorious comeback. It is true that Talmadge retired after her sound films failed. It's also true that her voice bore slight but not unpleasant traces of Brooklyn. But the truth about why Norma Talmadge's career ended bears little resemblance to the myths she inspired.

Talmadge rose to fame thanks to her beauty, a determined stage mother, and an advantageous marriage. The eldest of three daughters, she was born in 1894 to a strong-willed mother who raised her brood—Norma, Natalie, and Constance—in Brooklyn, running a home laundry,



renting out rooms, selling wrinkle cream, and teaching painting-on-velvet to housewives.

Anita Loos, who scripted films for both Norma and Constance, writes in *The Talmadge Girls* (1978) that Norma began posing for illustrated song slides as a teenager around 1910. Mother Peg then decided that her daughter belonged in motion pictures, and Norma went to work at Vitagraph Studios. Constance soon followed her sister into the movies, and the formidable Peg even got Natalie a clerical job in the film industry.

Although she made many films in both New York and California, Talmadge's career didn't take off until 1916 when she met and married Loew's theater chain executive Joseph Schenck. He wanted to break into film production and soon launched the Norma Talmadge Film Corporation. According to researcher Greta de Groat, most of Talmadge's early films were melodramas that "deal with a wider variety of contemporary social issues than her later films." Her final film made at the New

York studio was her biggest hit and one of her best, the supernatural romance *Smilin' Thru* (1922).

By the time Schenck moved his company to California in 1921, Talmadge was a huge star with a devoted following and critical respect. Once she went to Hollywood, her films got "bigger and glossier," de Groat writes. She worked with top directors such as Clarence Brown and Frank Borzage, earning acclaim for her performances in two Borzage pictures, *Secrets* (1924) and *The Lady* (1925). Film historian Jack Spears

summed up a Talmadge film of the Hollywood era: "a brave, tragic and sacrificing heroine, lavish settings and beautiful clothes, and buckets of tears before the eventual redemption at the fadeout."

When she made *The Woman Disputed*, Talmadge's popularity was on the wane and her marriage was in trouble. She had begun an affair with Mexican heartthrob Gilbert Roland on the set of *Camille* (1927). Schenck knew about the romance—Talmadge had asked for a divorce—but realized that the two were a great box office

team and paired them as costars three more times. In spite of excellent production values and the heat between the stars, the *Variety* critic wrote that *Camille* "lacks punch." *The Dove* (1928) and *The Woman Disputed* also met with critical disdain.

In *The Woman Disputed*, Talmadge plays a young Austrian woman forced into prostitution. She is befriended by two soldiers, an Austrian, played by Roland, and a Russian. Her love for Roland's character splits the friendship



Love among the ruins: Talmadge and Roland can't make it work on or off screen.

apart, and she must make the ultimate sacrifice for her country. Talmadge's beautiful close-ups bear the unmistakable imprint of director Henry King. "This understanding of portrait heads within a film became a rapidly waning art in the sound era," writes film historian Clive Denton, "but it remained with Henry King." King apparently disliked *The Woman Disputed*, and according to de Groat, Sam Taylor, co-credited as director, completed some scenes in the film.

King's career spanned half a century, ending

with 1962's *Tender Is the Night*, and his transition to talkies was seamless. Talmadge had a harder time. In silent films, she had played a variety of roles. The production values were first-rate and her wardrobe was often a highlight of a sometimes mediocre film. By the late 1920s, however, she could no longer count on Schenck's undivided attention to her career as their marriage was effectively over. Younger actresses more identified with the 1920s zeitgeist were surpassing her at the box office. The grandiose melodramas that her fans had loved seemed old-

fashioned. In a study of Talmadge's work, Greg M. Smith notes that sound films made her former versatility impossible. "The 'real' Talmadge was certainly incapable of reenacting her versatile range of silent cinema types. In the talkies Talmadge the masquerader was bound by the limitations of her body."

The critics' verdict on her voice in her sound debut, *New York*

*Nights* (1929), was favorable, but many agreed with the *Variety* critic who wrote, "A better picture will give her an even break." They were less kind about her performance in *Du Barry, Woman of Passion* (1930). Among the most brutal was a review in *Time*: "Norma Talmadge plays less pompously than might be expected, but people who liked her program pictures in the old days may hope that this will be the last attempt to establish her as a great figure in sound pictures. However, her diction is improving; in her first dialog effort she talked like an elocution pupil; this time she talks like an elocution teacher."

Loos claims that Constance Talmadge read the *Time* review and cabled her sister, "Quit pressing your luck, baby. The critics can't knock

those trust funds Mom set up for us." Norma agreed and retired from the screen with no apparent bitterness. According to film historian Jeanine Basinger, "Most of the young girls who became stars ... had a voracity for success that never left them. The Talmadges were different. They worked hard and did what was expected of them, but in the end, when fame abandoned them, they seemed to walk away with a 'who cares?' attitude."

Schenck eventually agreed to a divorce, but Talmadge decided against marrying Gilbert

Roland. He eventually married and divorced Constance Bennett and had a long and successful career. Talmadge married and divorced comedian George Jessel. In the 1940s, she began to suffer from crippling arthritis and became addicted to painkillers. She married her doctor in 1946 and withdrew from the public eye until her death in 1957. One story, possibly



Norma Talmadge employs all of her estimable charms, but Gustav von Seyffertitz's not buying...

apocryphal, about Talmadge's later years is that she shooed away autograph-seekers, saying: "Get away, dears, I don't need you anymore."

Earlier this year, two of Talmadge's films, *Kiki* (1926) and *Within the Law* (1923), were released on DVD, giving modern audiences a rare glimpse of her mastery of a now lost art. *New York Times* critic Dave Kehr wrote of her unique charm: "Screen acting, particularly in the silent era, was more concerned with the clean, clear delineation of significant surfaces—a repertory of gestures and facial expressions with agreed-upon meanings. On that level Talmadge is a virtuoso, precise in her attack, flawless in her smooth succession of different moods."

—MARGARITA LANDAZURI





## L'HEUREUSE MORT

Live Accompaniment by MATTI BYE ENSEMBLE

CAST: Nicolas Rimsky (Theodore Larue), Suzanne Bianchetti (Lucie Larue), Pierre Labry (Captain Mouche), René Maupré (Fayot), Léon Salem (Secretary of the Theater) PRODUCTION: Films Albatros 1924 DIRECTOR: Serge Nadjedine SCENARIO: Nicolas Rimsky, based on a story by Comtesse de Baillehache PHOTOGRAPHY: Fedote Bourgassof, Gaston Chelles UNIT MANAGER: Victor Sviatopolk-Mirsky PRINT SOURCE: Cinémathèque Française

A frothy farce of false identity, *L'heureuse mort* reveals little of the upheavals—wars, revolution, exodus—that lie behind its existence. It was produced by Russian filmmakers who fled the rising tide of revolution and landed in Paris. It was directed by Serge Nadjedine, a shadowy figure with little film experience. It was released to a French public fearful for the future of France's film industry. Yet it floats above these stormy crosscurrents as lightly as a cork upon the waves.

When Serge Nadjedine arrived in France in 1922, Paris was bursting with émigrés like him

who had escaped the uncertainties of revolutionary Russia. The center of bohemian life since the mid-18th century, Montmartre became the gathering place for Russian painters, singers, and poets. Former members of the Romanov court were driving cabs, running nightclubs, and modeling for French fashion houses. Coco Chanel was about to embark on her brief affair with the Grand Duke Dmitri Pavlovich, the dead Czar's cousin, which resulted in a season of Russian-inspired couture.

Films Albatros, a studio based in the Parisian

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Underwritten by Montine Hansl  
and the French and Swedish Consulates of San Francisco

suburb of Montreuil, was another hub of the émigré community. It began its existence as Ermol'ev-Cinéma, most of whose key personnel had followed producer Iosef Ermol'ev when he fled Moscow, spending three years shuttling among Kiev, Odessa, and Yalta, cities then occupied by an ever-changing guard of Czarist, German, and Allied troops. He carried films from his Moscow studio as well as bits and pieces of productions begun en route. Arriving in Paris in 1920, Ermol'ev-Cinéma finally finished the film its team had begun in Yalta, the appropriately titled *Harrowing Adventure*.

Nadjedine had fallen in with Ermol'ev's company in Yalta and was with them in 1920 when Odessa fell to Bolshevik troops and Allied ships transported the refugees to Constantinople. While the filmmakers traveled on to Paris, Nadjedine stayed in Constantinople. A graduate of the Aleksandrinskii Theatre in St. Petersburg, he found work as a ballet master and theater director, all the while hoping for a job in America. The job never materialized. Instead, Alexandre Kamenka, an acquaintance from St. Petersburg, urged him to come to Paris. Kamenka was now the head of Ermol'ev-Cinéma, reorganized under the name Films Albatros with the motto, "Upright, in spite of the storm."

The studio's motto was also a fitting description for France's film industry, which had been crippled by the twin blows of World War I and the subsequent wave of American films flooding the

European market. France, the birthplace of film exhibition, saw its native production decline so severely that by 1919 only ten percent of films playing in Paris were French-made. "No one realizes the stagnation against which the French film industry is struggling," wrote a critic in *L'illustration* in 1919. "Hypnotized by the remarkable American productions [...] our producers seem to have given up trying to create a formula for French film art."

In their effort to revive French production,

French filmmakers tried serials in imitation of the hugely popular *The Perils of Pauline*. Directors celebrated the French countryside in realist films like André Antoine's *La terre* (1921). They invested in "super-productions" like *Koenigsmark* (1923) and *Madame Sans-Gene* (1925), which starred box-office draw Gloria Swanson. While each genre offered intermittent success, none proved to be the magic formula to cure the industry of its ills. Former production giants Pathé and Gaumont produced fewer



Suzanne Bianchetti, as the mistakenly widowed Lucie Larue, knows how to spin a whale of a tale.

films, turning to distribution (often of American films) to keep up revenue.

This production void was an opportunity for new, smaller studios like Ermol'ev's Albatros. After its big hit *La maison du mystère* (1922), Albatros's production expanded to a high of seven films in 1924, three of which were made by newcomer Nadjedine. Born in 1880, Nadjedine was 44 when he undertook this new career (although some accounts suggest he may have worked on films in Czarist Russia, no evidence has been found to



support that claim). His first directing assignment in France was *Le chiffonnier de Paris* (*The Ragpicker of Paris*). A review in *Mon ciné* noted, "a Russian director, still unknown here." The film is a sentimental melodrama, involving an abandoned child, a villainous officer, and a miscarriage of justice—all set right by the kind-hearted ragpicker.

Nadjedine's next film, *La cible* (*The Target*), about a South American refugee named Diaz de Tolédo, was co-written by Nadjedine and fellow Russian émigré Nicolas Rimsky, who also plays the lead character's evil alter ego in the film. Rimsky (born Kourmacheff) then wrote the script for Nadjedine's third film for Albatros, *L'heureuse mort*, in which he plays both a mediocre French playwright, Théodore Larue, and his look-alike brother. While on a pleasure cruise, Larue falls overboard and is presumed drowned. Returning home, he finds that death has transformed him into a literary genius, his plays now much in demand. Comic situations ensue as Larue pretends to be his own brother returned from the colonies, in an effort to reap the benefits of his posthumous acclaim.

This farcical exploration of the fluidity of identity has its own share of stylistic shape-shifting, incorporating melodrama and, in one sequence, animation, as well as borrowing from the visual style of the French avant-garde. In Nadjedine's hands, however, rapid cutting, off-center framing, and image reversal are used to comic effect. In one instance, a subjective camera shows the timid, seasick Larue experiencing a mild storm as a dizzying hurricane. *Cinémagazine's* critic wrote, "a very good film for which I predict a fruitful career." In sharp contrast to the historical extravaganzas dominating the bigger studios, *L'heureuse mort* is fresh, modern, and above all, funny. Film historian Richard Abel observed, "Ironically, it was the young Albatros company formed of Russian émigrés that initiated the renewal of French film comedy."

*L'heureuse mort* was Nadjedine's last film for Albatros. Even as he wrapped production, the character of the studio was changing dramati-

cally. Charles Vanel had described Albatros in its early days as a place where "émigrés slept in dressing rooms ... the tailor was a Czarist general, the cook an Orthodox priest, the chief engineer a Cossack colonel." However, by the mid-'20s, the once tightly knit émigré community began to drift apart. Iosef Ermol'ev was the first, departing for Germany in 1922. Director Jakov Protazanov returned to Russia in 1923. The biggest defection came at the end of 1924, when Kamenka's producing partner Noe Bloch left to join the Russian-financed Ciné-France-Film, taking directors, actors, and technicians with him. After his departure, Kamenka turned to directors from the French avant-garde who had long interested him. Marcel L'Herbier, Jacques Feyder, and Jean Epstein all collaborated with Albatros, and René Clair made several classic French comedies under the studio's wings.

Perhaps this shift spurred Nadjedine's departure. The director made only one more film, *Naples au baiser du feu* (1925), for producer André Legrand. Then he moved to America, where he eventually found a job as head of the Russian Imperial Ballet School in Cleveland, Ohio—replacing Nikolai Semenov, who had thrown himself over Niagara Falls in protest against the ugliness of modern dance. As far as we know, Nadjedine's final exile was less tempestuous. He became an American citizen in 1942 and died in Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio, in 1958. His obituary in the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* barely mentions his foray into film.

—MONICA NOLAN

*L'heureuse mort's* animated sequence features a duel.



GEORGES  
**MÉLIÈS**  
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**THE SILENT  
 FILM FESTIVAL  
 SALUTES  
 CINEMA'S  
 FIRST  
 VIRTUOSO**

**with a selection of  
 his enchanting  
 short films  
 to play  
 throughout  
 the festival**

On December 28, 1895, in the Grand Café on le boulevard des Capucines in Paris, a 34-year-old magician sat among the other 30-odd guests, which included the directors of the Folies Bergère and the Grévin Wax Museum, waiting for the program to begin. Owner of the 200-seat Théâtre Robert-Houdin since selling his share of his father's luxury shoe business in 1888, he performed illusions like his 1891 act entitled, *American Spiritualistic Mediums*, for which the decapitated head of the loquacious Professor Clodien Borbenfouilles is placed in a bowl yet keeps talking. He closed his shows with magic lantern projections, designed to spook and delight Parisians on a night out in the late 19th century. Sitting that night in front of a blank screen in the Salon Indien, he did not expect to be impressed. "Have we been brought here to see projections?" Georges Méliès complained to

the person sitting nearest him. "I've been doing these for ten years."

By the end of the program of Lumière brothers' actualités, Méliès had changed his tune, offering 10,000 francs for the moving image contraption the very next day. His proposal declined, he instead bought a Theatrograph from Britain's R.W. Paul and began screening Edison shorts at the end of his shows. By spring 1896, he had developed a camera of his own and made his first film, *Une partie de cartes*, a one-minute imitation of the Lumières' *partie d'ecarté* of the previous year. By December, he inaugurated his company Star Film with its slogan, "The Whole World Within Reach," and began construction on his own glasshouse studio in Montreuil.

He built a diverse catalog, providing actualités, reenactments of current events, and advertising films, dramas, comedies, and even stag films.



But it was the epiphany he had after his camera jammed then restarted on la place de l'Opéra that came to define Méliès as a filmmaker. Watching the footage later that day, he reported: "I suddenly saw a Madeleine-Bastille omnibus change into a hearse and men into women." He realized that by simply stopping the camera to change the scenery, he could create the same illusions he had been performing on stage. His October 1896 film *Escamotage d'une dame chez Robert-Houdin* (*The Vanishing Lady*) shows Jehanne d'Arcy—his mistress and the future second Madame Méliès—instantly replaced by a skeleton. The trick film was born. Disappearing ladies, removable body parts, and trips to the moon made his films so popular that American film distributors copied and resold them under their own banners. Siegmund Lubin once tried to sell Méliès his own 1902 *A Trip to the Moon*. Despite the unscrupulous competition (even a little because of it), Georges Méliès dominated one quarter of the worldwide film industry by 1909.

The Méliès operation was a one-man show. He managed the theater, wrote, produced, directed, edited, and acted in his films, as well as designing the sets and costumes. For *A Trip to the Moon*, the first science fiction film ever made, he sculpted the now iconic clay moon where the astronomers land their spaceship. But as quickly as his success surged, it seemed also to decline. Changing production techniques and tastes of audiences combined with his own personal tragedies, forcing him to sell his theater in 1915.

By 1923, he had dismantled his studio and sold off all his scenery, props, costumes and, because he had no place left to store them, destroyed all his negatives. We know of him today because film critic Leon Druhot who, after discovering Méliès selling toys at a Paris train station, began to write about him. One of cinema's first storytellers became, fittingly, the first to be rediscovered.

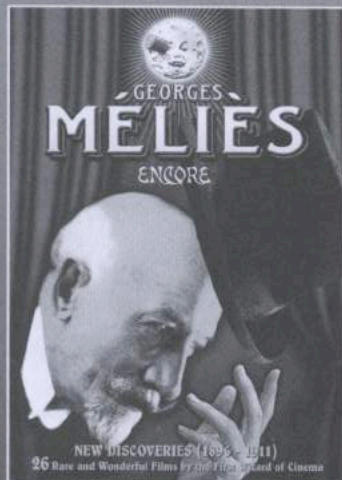
—SHARI KIZIRIAN

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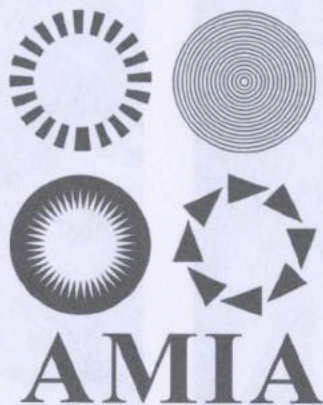
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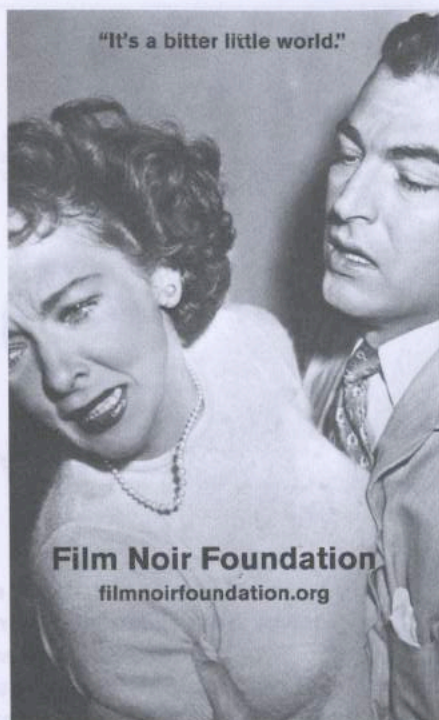
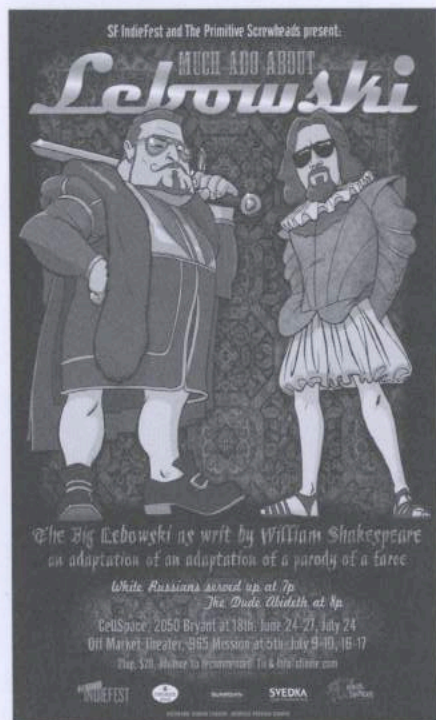
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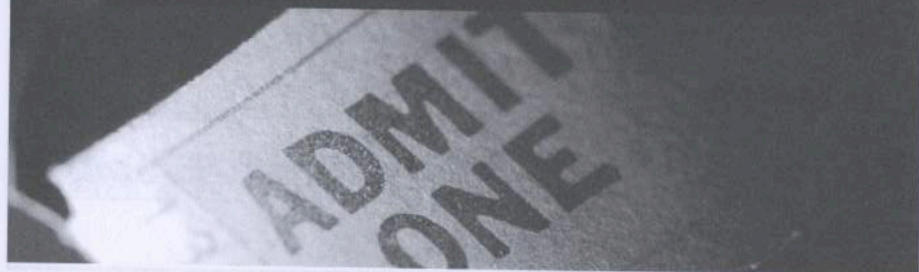
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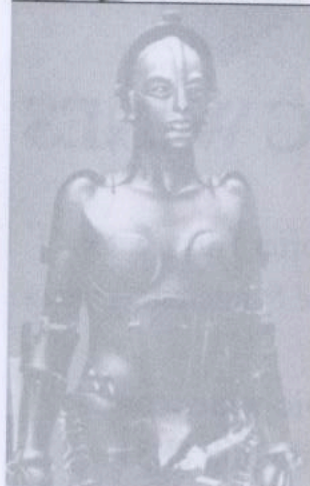
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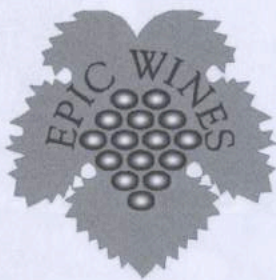
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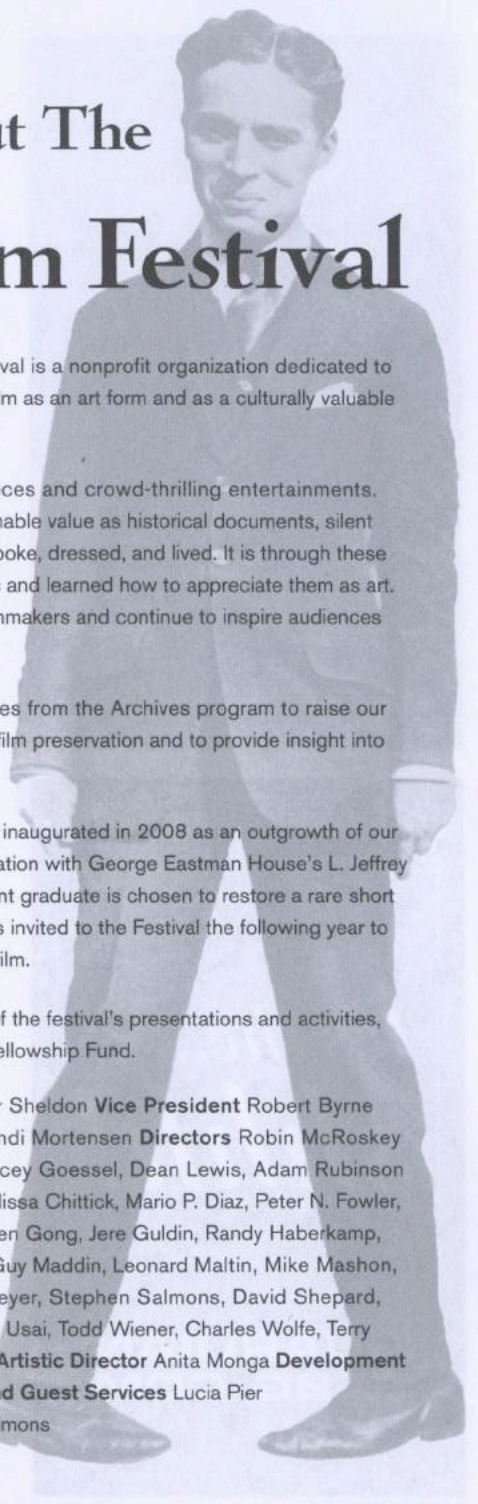
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# About The Silent Film Festival

**T**he San Francisco Silent Film Festival is a nonprofit organization dedicated to educating the public about silent film as an art form and as a culturally valuable historical record.

Silent-era filmmakers produced masterpieces and crowd-thrilling entertainments. Remarkable for their artistry and their inestimable value as historical documents, silent films show us how our ancestors thought, spoke, dressed, and lived. It is through these films that the world first came to love movies and learned how to appreciate them as art. They have influenced every generation of filmmakers and continue to inspire audiences nearly a century after they were made.

In 2006, we began our annual Amazing Tales from the Archives program to raise our audience's awareness of the importance of film preservation and to provide insight into the remarkable work done by film archives.

The Silent Film Preservation Fellowship was inaugurated in 2008 as an outgrowth of our commitment to film preservation. In collaboration with George Eastman House's L. Jeffrey Selznick School of Film Preservation, a recent graduate is chosen to restore a rare short or feature film or selected film footage and is invited to the Festival the following year to attend the world premiere of the preserved film.

Your donation, in addition to supporting all of the festival's presentations and activities, also supports the Silent Film Preservation Fellowship Fund.

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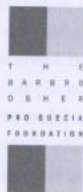
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**Spotlight:** Philip Bonner

**Stage Manager:** Richard Hildreth

**Transportation:** Robert Byrne, David Johansson, Andrew Korniej

**Videography:** William King

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## Special Thanks (continued)

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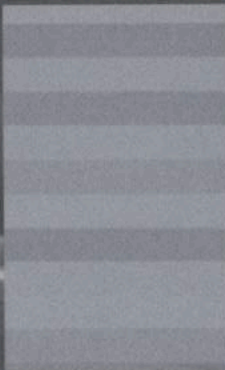
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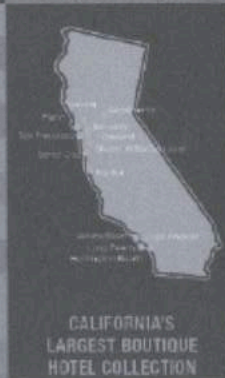
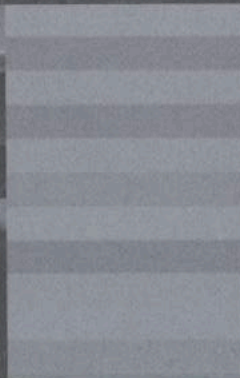
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