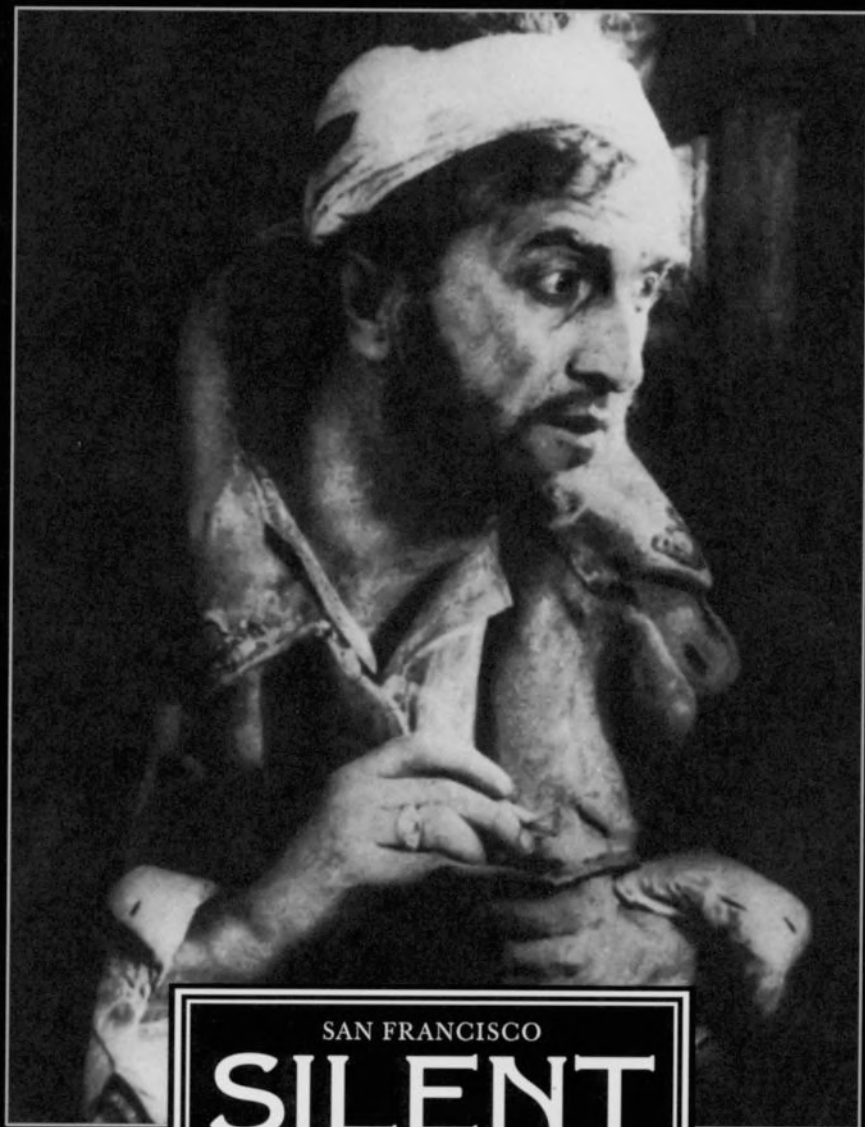


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December 12, 2009
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Schedule & Table of Contents

Saturday, December 12, 2009

11:30 am

CHANG: A Drama of the Wilderness

Introduction by Mark Cotta Vaz
Piano Accompaniment by Donald Sosin

2:00 pm

J'ACCUSE

North American Premiere!
Introduction by Robert Byrne
Accompaniment by Robert Israel on
the Mighty Wurlitzer

5:15 pm **Festival Party**

Following *J'Accuse*, join us for drinks,
appetizers, fabulous company, and live music
on the Castro mezzanine!

7:00 pm

SHERLOCK JR. and THE GOAT

Introduction by Frank Buxton
Special Guest: Melissa Cox
Book Signing: Gary Lee Parks, Jack Tillmany
Accompaniment by Dennis James
on the Mighty Wurlitzer, aided by Foley artist
Todd Manley with special sound effects!

9:15 pm

WEST OF ZANZIBAR

Introduction by Jesse Hawthorne Ficks
Accompaniment by Dennis James on
the Mighty Wurlitzer

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MUSICIANS *in residence*



Robert Israel

A protégé of the legendary theater organist Gaylord Carter, Israel made his professional debut at the age of 17, only six months after he began formal studies on the piano and organ. He served as music director of special events for the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences 12 years in a row (1994–2005). In addition to live performances, he and his orchestra have recorded scores for numerous films.



Dennis James

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



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.

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

Yamaha baby grand piano supplied by Absolutely Music



CHANG: A DRAMA OF THE WILDERNESS

Live Piano Accompaniment and Original Score by DONALD SOSIN

CAST: Kru (The Pioneer), Chantui (His Wife), Nah (Their Little Boy), Ladah (Their Little Girl), Bimbo (Their Pet); with 500 native hunters, 400 elephants, tigers, leopards, pythons, and other denizens of the wild RELEASE COMPANY: Famous Players-Lasky 1928 PRODUCTION, DIRECTION, AND EDITING: Ernest B. Schoedsack and Merian C. Cooper PHOTOGRAPHY: Ernest B. Schoedsack TITLES: Achmed Abdullah INTERPRETER: Kru Muang CHIEF TRAPPER: Tahn FILM PRINT: 35mm, approximately 68 minutes PRINT SOURCE: Milestone Film & Video

Carrying 20,000 feet of undeveloped film from Isfahan in central Persia across the Mediterranean to Paris, Merian Coldwell Cooper and Ernest Beaumont Schoedsack already knew what was missing from their picture. After 18 months trekking around Eurasia, they had found a nomadic tribe to follow and joined the Bakhtiari's 46-day migration over the Zagros Mountains. They captured astonishing footage, including the harrowing crossing of the icy Karun River on goatskin rafts. Still, they were dissatisfied.

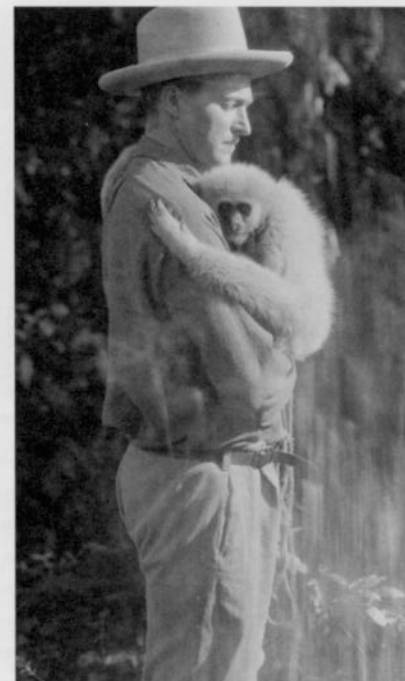
Schoedsack volunteered to stay behind to film a Bakhtiari family in order to create a drama relatable for audiences back home. Yet only 80 feet of film stock remained, Cooper had been wearing dancing pumps for most of the migration, and Schoedsack's Palm Beach linen suit was in tatters. They were broke. *Grass* (1925) would have to be cut together with what they had. The "character interest" they sought would have to wait for their next film, *Chang: A Drama in the Wilderness* (1927).

Both born in 1893, Cooper and Schoedsack were reared in an imperial age, when the United States began invoking Manifest Destiny to justify global expansion. Men of their time, they were raised on the myths of explorers like Richard Burton who helped map Africa and the Arabian Peninsula, novels like Robert Louis Stevenson's 1883 *Treasure Island*, and tales of exotic lands by naturalists such as Paul Belloni du Chaillu, whose illustrations of gorillas fascinated the West. Conflating war and adventure, Cooper and Schoedsack eagerly answered the call in 1917 to "make the world safe for democracy."

The pair met in Vienna after World War I, when Schoedsack was shooting newsreel footage and Cooper, a bomber pilot, had just been released from a German prisoner-of-war camp. Aiding Polish refugees during the Russo-Polish War, they became fast friends. Later, in 1922, on an expedition led by explorer Edward A. Salisbury to locate a race of men with tails in the Malay Archipelago, Cooper invited Schoedsack to replace the original cameraman who had become too frightened to stay aboard. Waylaid in Addis Ababa, Cooper and Schoedsack shot footage of the soon-to-be Haile Selassie's efforts to liberate Ethiopia. *The Golden Prince* was to be the duo's first joint documentary, but Salisbury turned the footage into travelogue instead. Disappointed but undeterred, they embarked on a new project to film "a great national migration."

With *Grass*, Cooper and Schoedsack joined the navy band of 20th century camera adventurers who used the moving image to document the conflicts, peoples, cultures, wildlife, and landscapes

they encountered and, later, to publicize their adventures. Jessica Borthwick changed her film magazines under the cover of sheepskin rugs in the Rhodope Mountains while filming the second Balkan War. Lowell Thomas spread the fame of T.E. Lawrence, touring with films and photographs of the British Intelligence officer who led the Arab Revolt against the Ottomans. Biologist Carl Akeley invented a special camera and tripod so he could more easily film gorillas in their natural habitat. Silvino Santos documented explorer Alexander Hamilton Rice's search for El Dorado in the



Merian C. Cooper and his preferred jungle companion, Bimbo

Amazon. Robert Flaherty created a myth out of Inuit life in Arctic Quebec with *Nanook of the North* (1922).

Jesse Lasky of Famous Players-Lasky recognized the box-office draw of "real-life" dramas like *Nanook*, commissioning Flaherty's next project *Moana* (1926), set in Samoa. When Lasky saw *Grass* as part of its lecture circuit tour in New York, he agreed to distribute it theatrically, adding a prologue that featured Cooper and Schoedsack and padding the ending with outtakes. *Grass* earned more than \$85,000 in its three-month run at New York's Criterion Theater. Foreseeing big profit at little

expense, Lasky put up \$75,000 for *Chang*.

Cooper and Schoedsack had Flaherty in mind when they set out for Siam's remote jungles, staying more than one year among the Lao of Nan Province. They assembled a fictional family, complete with a pet gibbon. They built a solitary house in the jungle to manufacture a drama that no Lao would actually risk, life away from other villagers. They also manufactured close-action situations with tigers and elephants to thrill audiences back

home. Cooper acknowledged the artifice of their story in a letter to Isaiah Bowman, director of the American Geographical Society: "Under the instructions of our head office, we are 'working in' a slight dramatic theme. The result will unquestionably be quite artificial; yet in its way, it will tell—even if caricatured [*sic*—the very real struggle of the jungle man."

What is known of their many months in Siam comes from their testimony alone, principally from Cooper's letters and the articles and interviews written as part of the film's promotion. Cooper

often expressed frustration in dealing with the Lao, complaining that they did not follow instructions when helping to trap tigers, a task the locals understandably did not relish. Years later in an interview with historian Kevin Brownlow, Cooper chuckled when describing how he had slapped the Lao chief



Chang's fictional family with Bimbo the gibbon and the filmmakers

whose wife then spiked Cooper's dinner with bamboo barbs in revenge.

To prevent Lasky's editors from padding their latest film, Cooper and Schoedsack cut it themselves, discarding leftover footage. When *Chang* premiered in New York in April 1927, it was a hit. Audiences were thrilled in particular by the elephant stampede scene, which was projected in "Magnascope," a process whereby a wide-angle lens enlarged the image to fill the entire proscenium. The film went on to gross nearly \$2 million and, at the first Academy Awards in 1929, it received an honorable mention for "Unique and Artistic Picture" alongside King Vidor's *The Crowd*. When Cooper and Schoedsack proposed their next project, an adaptation of A.E.W. Mason's 1902 novel *The Four Feathers*, the studio bought the rights.

A mix of on-location and back-lot shooting, *The*

Four Feathers (1929) marked the team's departure from Flaherty-style filmmaking, a move that became final when they made 1933's *King Kong*. Written by Schoedsack's wife Ruth Rose, *Kong* was based on the travel adventures of Cooper and Schoedsack; the two directors even play the pilots who shoot down the doomed ape at the end.

Schoedsack went on to a solo directing career, making his last film in 1949, *Mighty Joe Young*. Cooper became the head of production at RKO, where he produced *Becky Sharp* (1935), the first three-strip Technicolor feature, and began a partnership with director John Ford that lasted through 1956's *The Searchers*. Cooper also attempted Technicolor versions of both *Grass* and *Chang*, but neither film was completed.

Meanwhile, the "natural dramas" shot by adventure-filmmakers like Cooper and Schoedsack became the subject of ongoing debate. In 1933, Franz Boas, the chief anthropologist at the American Museum of Natural History, had written to Will Hays of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America, proposing a collaboration between Hollywood and science. "[These films]," he wrote, "might have been ever so much more interesting if a person had been consulted who knows the social life of the people intimately."

That the people themselves knew best was not mentioned. *Chang* was released in Bangkok in 1929, but no information is available in English about what the Lao thought of the film. The Inuit who have watched *Nanook of the North* view it as inauthentic to the point of being laughable. Yet the film still has value for them. "[T]hese pictures," says one Inuit man in Claude Massot's 1988 documentary *Nanook Revisited*, "are the only pictures ... of that time in this region." —SHARI KIZIRIAN



J'ACCUSE

North American Premiere

Live Accompaniment by ROBERT ISRAEL on the Mighty Wurlitzer

CAST: Romuald Joubé (Jean Diaz), Séverin-Mars (François Laurin), Marise Dauvray (Edith Laurin), Maxime Desjardins (Maria Lazare), Mme. Mancini (Mother Diaz), Angèle Guys (Angèle), Angèle Decori (Marie, The Servant), Nader (The Army Cook) PRODUCTION: Pathé-Frères 1918 DIRECTOR: Abel Gance PRODUCER: Charles Pathé SCENARIO: Abel Gance PHOTOGRAPHY: Marc Bujard, Léonce-Henri Burel, and Maurice Forster EDITORS: Andrée Danis and Abel Gance FILM PRINT: 35mm, original tinting and toning reproduced using Desmet method, approximately 162 minutes PRINT SOURCE: Nederlands Filmmuseum

Five months after the armistice was signed that ended World War I, Abel Gance premiered his epic *J'Accuse* in Paris. Called the Great War, WWI was also dubbed "the war to end all wars," and Gance's film was aimed at making that statement a reality. Many of his own friends had been killed in the trenches, and, as Gance later explained, "*J'Accuse* for me was not just a film I had a feeling of frenzy to use this new medium, the cinema, to show the world the stupidity of war."

J'Accuse was not the first antiwar film, but the way Gance told his story, using expressionistic camerawork and innovative editing techniques, profoundly influenced filmmaking from Hollywood to Moscow. At age 20, Gance began working in

films as a scriptwriter and actor. Two years later, in 1911, he formed a production company and directed the one-reel costume drama *La Digue* (or *Pour sauver la Hollande*). He followed his debut with several other popular short narrative films before the war intervened, decimating European film production. In 1914, Gance volunteered as a civilian stretcher-bearer. He was soon drafted into the French Army and assigned to the cinematographic section. He described the experience as "a preposterous business" but managed to avoid photographing at the front. His final assignment was at a poison gas factory, and, in 1915, the army discharged him after he was diagnosed with tuberculosis.

Co-presented by ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE of SAN FRANCISCO with the generous assistance of CONSULATE GENERAL of FRANCE, SAN FRANCISCO

Gance returned to filmmaking with *La Folie du Docteur Tube* (1915), a short avant-garde comedy photographed using mirrors to create distorted images. In 1916, he wrote and directed his first feature-length films, society dramas for the French production company Société de Film d'Art, where he experimented with the cross-action editing developed by D.W. Griffith, extreme close-ups, tracking shots, and other techniques that became essential to cinema's visual language.

Gance began writing the scenario for *J'Accuse* in 1917. "I believe," he wrote in his journal at that time, "that the social significance of *J'Accuse* is

profound and that the film will triumph everywhere and nothing will shackle its purpose." The main story is a love triangle, which becomes complicated by the onset of war. Jean, a pacifist poet, is in love with Edith who is unhappily married to François, a brutish provincial farmer. When war is declared, both men join the army, serving in the same frontline regiment. Battling the Germans together, Jean and



François and Jean: enemies at home, compatriots at the front

François reach an uneasy truce between themselves. Meanwhile back at home, a suspicious François had sent Edith into exile and, perhaps intentionally, into harm's way.

For Gance and his colleagues, the horror of war was not an abstract notion. Most of the letters used in the film's intertitles were actual letters home by two of Gance's friends, both of whom were killed. The extras in battle and the dead on the battlefields were actual soldiers. "There were great numbers of soldiers coming to the Midi on eight-day passes—a little breather after four years at the front," Gance

later explained. "I asked the local HQ if I could borrow two thousand. These men had come straight from the front They had seen it all, and now they played the dead knowing they would probably die themselves. In a few weeks or months, 80 percent of them would disappear. I knew it and so did they."

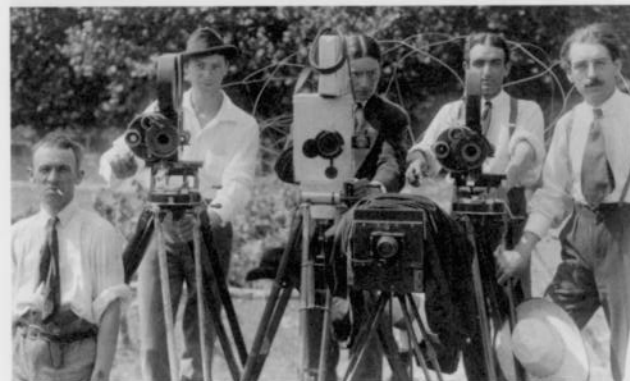
J'Accuse's release so close to the end of the war amplified its impact on the European public. After the French premiere, the British trade newspaper *Kinematograph Weekly* accurately predicted, "*J'Accuse* has created a furor in its native France, it will do the same wherever it is shown

in Britain." After the film opened at London's Philharmonic Hall, the *London Times* reported, "The miracle has been achieved. A film has caused an audience to think," and a review in a later issue of *Kinematograph Weekly* called it "... one of the most terrible indictments against war which it is possible to imagine."

European newspapers praised the film, and Gance became recognized as one of the

continent's most important directors. Yet two years passed before *J'Accuse* crossed the Atlantic. American distributors were typically cool to foreign films, and *J'Accuse's* long running time and pacifist message were also considered liabilities. In May 1921, Gance traveled to New York to promote the film at a preview for theater owners and the press. The screening took place at the Ritz-Carlton, and the 400-person audience included D.W. Griffith and Lillian and Dorothy Gish. Griffith was so impressed that he invited Gance to his studio and subsequently arranged for the film to be distributed by United Artists.

Despite the enthusiastic preview reception, *J'Accuse* was dramatically altered for its American release in October 1921. Renamed *I Accuse*, the film was given a happy ending and Gance's anti-war message was distorted into an endorsement of patriotism. American critics who had attended the original preview decried the mutilation. "To those who saw the original *J'Accuse*, or have heard



J'Accuse camera operators with Abel Gance (far right) and his assistant, poet Blaise Cendrars

of it, "lamented the *New York Times*, "it is necessary to say, first of all, that *I Accuse* is not the same thing." A later *New York Times* article summarizing the film events of the year concluded that "... Abel Gance's terrific *J'Accuse* ... was so emasculated before it reached the public screen under the title *I Accuse* that it must be counted as lost." Predictably, the Americanized *I Accuse*, released to an indifferent public, was not a commercial success.

A similar fate befell Gance's two epics of the 1920s, *La Roue* (1921) and *Napoléon* (1926), neither of which reached American audiences in their original form. In these films, Gance expanded the repertoire of film technique by further developing his innovations of widescreen and split-screen imagery, *rapide montage* (quick-cut editing), and expressive camera movement, all of which influenced cinema far beyond the silent era. Russian director Sergei Eisenstein personally thanked Gance for teaching him the art of film, and, in 1979, historian Kevin Brownlow declared, "If D.W. Griffith gave us the grammar of film, then

Abel Gance gave us an encyclopedia for the new art form with his heroic achievements."

Ninety years after its European premiere, American audiences can finally watch Gance's *J'Accuse* as he meant it to be seen. In 2007, Nederlands Filmmuseum and Lobster Films joined forces to restore the European release version of *J'Accuse*. They combined source material from six

different prints, including one reel of Gance's original camera negative and the only extant print featuring the original tinting and toning. Warped and shrunken sequences were stabilized and film frames cleaned of scratches, nitrate deterioration, mold, rust, projector oil, and, in one case, even a squashed bug. The final climactic reel of *J'Accuse* now retains Gance's intended combination of blue toning and

lavender tinting, creating a surreal effect in the haunting finale. At the end of the restoration process, two 35mm release prints and a preservation negative were produced, ensuring that *J'Accuse* survives for generations to come.

—ROBERT BYRNE





SHERLOCK JR. WITH THE GOAT

Live Accompaniment by DENNIS JAMES on the Mighty Wurlitzer
and Special Sound Effects by Foley Artist Todd Manley

SHERLOCK JR. CAST: Buster Keaton (Projectionist/Sherlock Jr.), Kathryn McGuire (The Girl), Joe Keaton (Her Father), Erwin Connelly (Butler), Ward Crane (The Sheik), Ford West (Manager/Gillette) PRODUCTION: Metro Pictures Corporation 1924 DIRECTOR: Buster Keaton PRODUCER: Joseph M. Schenck SCENARIO: Clyde Bruckman, Jean Havez, and Joe Mitchell PHOTOGRAPHY: Byron Houck and Elgin Lessley ART DIRECTION: Fred Gabourie FILM PRINT: 35mm, approximately 45 minutes PRINT SOURCE: David Shepard, courtesy of Douris UK Ltd.

THE GOAT CAST: Buster Keaton, Virginia Fox (Police Chief's Daughter), Joe Roberts (Police Chief), Malcolm St. Clair (Dead Shot Dan) DIRECTORS: Buster Keaton and Malcolm St. Clair FILM PRINT: 35mm, approximately 25 minutes PRINT SOURCE: David Shepard, courtesy of Douris UK Ltd.

From the destruction of a railroad bridge—with a train on top—in *The General* (1926) to the collapse of a house around his ears in *Steamboat Bill Jr.* (1928), Buster Keaton went to great lengths to entertain his public. While his characters walked away stone-faced and unharmed, the actor often suffered serious injury. In his fourth feature-length film, *Sherlock Jr.* (1924), he plays a projectionist

who falls asleep and dreams he's the star of a movie about a "crime-crushing" detective. The scenario, with its nonstop string of stage gags and illusions, allowed Keaton to perform some of his most impressive stunts, one of which nearly cost him his life.

Jumping from the top of a moving freight car, he swings down to grab the water tower's release

rope. During the shoot, the water gushed out with such force that Keaton lost his grip and was thrown to the track below, hitting his head on the rail. Despite being in severe pain, the always professional 29-year-old got up to finish the scene. During a routine physical examination 11 years later, an X-ray revealed that Keaton had fractured his neck.

Pearl White, Tom Mix, Roscoe "Fatty" Arbuckle, and Harold Lloyd were among the silent-era stars who performed their own stunts. Yet Keaton was singular in his willingness to risk life and limb, determined to outdo himself with every picture. He had honed a repertoire of pratfalls in his early years in Vaudeville, where he had been flung around the stage for comic effect as part of a family act. When he turned to filmmaking, he combined his comic timing and willingness to court danger with the added element of the camera, bringing it close to the action, so the audience could feel the actor's peril.

Keaton first stepped onto a film set in 1917 at Roscoe "Fatty" Arbuckle's Comique Film Corporation. He was so intrigued by the camera that he asked to take one home. He took it completely apart, studied every piece, and returned it intact the next morning. When he stepped in front of the camera to make his film debut in Arbuckle's *The Butcher Boy* (1917), he was just beginning to exploit the camera's potential.

At Comique, Keaton first met gag-writer Clyde Bruckman, who understood the actor's "man against mechanics" approach to physical comedy. The two men spent four to five days a week at Keaton's home, mapping out elaborate stunts. They became lifelong friends, sharing an affinity

for cards and liquor. Bruckman was a key member of Keaton's team in the 1920s, writing *Sherlock Jr.* and directing *The General* (1926). He also worked with other comedy legends, directing Harold Lloyd in *Welcome Danger* (1929) and W.C. Fields in *The Fatal Glass of Beer* (1933), as well as writing scores of gags for the Three Stooges.

Keaton worked as an independent for more than 10 years, making 19 shorts and 11 features before signing a contract with MGM in 1928. Keaton was accustomed to improvising gags



Keaton worked extensively behind the camera to perfect his films.

around a rough story outline. But MGM's money-conscious producers, who were tackling the conversion to sound, wanted accountability. Actor Harold Goodwin recalled friction between Keaton and his new bosses on the set of *The Cameraman*, Keaton's first MGM picture. "[A] situation arises that has comic potential and [Keaton] likes to milk it for all it's worth," he told Keaton biographer Tom Dardis in 1977. "The brass wanted to know how they could budget a show if we didn't follow the script." Al-

though *The Cameraman* was a late silent-era hit, MGM reined in Keaton's spendthrift habits. Both sides were unhappy with the partnership, so Keaton and MGM temporarily parted ways in February 1933.

In 1937, he was back on the MGM payroll, this time as a gag writer. Assigned to the Marx Brothers' *At the Circus* (1939), the ever-punctual Keaton arrived at 8 a.m., while the brothers showed up after lunch. Despite his frustration with the casual work ethic of his "all-talkie" successors, Keaton worked on and off as a comedy consultant for the studio until 1950, coaching comedy stars such as Red Skelton.

Bruckman and Keaton were reunited professionally for *Pest from the West* (1939), the first of 10 two-reel shorts for Columbia Pictures. Most of the shorts were shot on a small budget and a time schedule of three days. Keaton disliked the series and critics regard it as the nadir of his career.

Depression and alcoholism affected the careers of both Keaton and Bruckman. Keaton's initial departure from MGM coincided with a bitter divorce from his first wife, which left him nearly destitute. Bruckman's drinking ended his career as a director after he vanished for a full week during production of *The Man on the Flying Trapeze* (1935).

Although he continued to find employment writing, he was known to recycle his own gags. In 1942, Harold Lloyd, who retained the rights to his films, sued Columbia Pictures, charging Bruckman with lifting routines from *Movie Crazy* and *The Freshman* (1925) for two Three Stooges shorts.

Lloyd, ironically, became a savior for both Bruckman and Keaton, suggesting to agent Ben Pearson that Keaton's physical comedy was well-suited to television.

Pearson contacted Bruckman in order to get in touch with Keaton. The result was *The Buster Keaton Show*, for which Bruckman wrote sketches that Keaton performed for an audience. It was broadcast live for 17 weeks in 1950. Thirteen episodes of a second series, *Life with Buster Keaton*, were shot on film and syndicated nationwide in 1951. The film format eliminated the studio audience, and Keaton quickly lost interest. He turned to guest appearances on other shows and commercials.

Bruckman found more work on the small

screen through Hollywood stars who had begun dabbling in television, including Abbott and Costello. Unfortunately, Bruckman's recycling of material provoked another successful lawsuit by Lloyd, effectively ending his movie career. In 1955, Bruckman fatally shot himself in a diner restroom with a gun he had borrowed from Keaton.

Keaton was shocked by Bruckman's suicide. His friend was the last link to Keaton's silent-era gang. The ensuing police investigation further rattled him, and, later that same year, his mother Myra died. Distraught and drinking heavily, Keaton

was hospitalized with a ruptured esophagus. He recovered, but the effects of alcoholism and the damage to his body from years of pratfalls had taken their toll.

It was widely known in Hollywood that Buster Keaton's stunt doubles had little to do on set except watch him work. When Keaton made his last feature film, *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* (1966), at the age of 71, stunt man Mick Dillon was hired to do the running

required for Keaton's character, "Erroneous." Years after Keaton's death in 1966, Dillon, embarrassed that he was the one to double for the legendary actor, revealed to author Marion Meade that Keaton was unable to perform many of the simple routines. Dillon recalled one wonderful incident when Keaton was shooting the close-up of a running scene and surprised everyone by doing one of his famous pratfalls after colliding with a tree. He got up and walked away, unharmed.

—DAVID JOHANSSON

The Goat will precede *Sherlock Jr.*



The Great Stone Face behind bars in *The Goat*



WEST OF ZANZIBAR

Live Accompaniment by DENNIS JAMES on the Mighty Wurlitzer

CAST: Lon Chaney (Phroso), Lionel Barrymore (Crane), Warner Baxter (Doc), Mary Nolan (Maizie), Jacqueline Gadsden (Anna), Roscoe Ward (Tiny), Kalla Pasha (Babe), Curtis Nero (Bumbu), Chaz Chase (Music Hall Performer), Mrs. Louise Emmons (Old Woman on the Street), Rose Dione (Owner of Zanzibar Dive), Emmett King (Stage Manager) PRODUCTION: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer 1928 DIRECTOR: Tod Browning PRODUCER: Irving G. Thalberg SCENARIO: Elliott Clawson and Waldemar Young, adapted from the play *Kongo* by Charles de Vonde and Kilbourn Gordon PHOTOGRAPHY: Percy Hillburn EDITOR: Harry Reynolds WARDROBE: David Cox ASSISTANT DIRECTOR: Harry Sharrock FILM PRINT: 35mm, approximately 65 minutes PRINT SOURCE: Warner Bros.

"An outpouring of the Cesspools of Hollywood! ... How any normal person could have thought that this horrible syphilitic play could have made an entertaining picture, even with Lon Chaney, who appears in gruesome and repulsive stories, is beyond comprehension." That was the judgment on *West of Zanzibar* by *Harrison's Reports*, a trade journal for independent theater owners that fashioned itself as watchdog against motion picture excesses. The "syphilitic play" was *Kongo*, a 1926 Broadway

success that starred Walter Huston as "Flint," an obsessive avenger unleashed in the jungles of colonial Africa. Hollywood's censor-in-chief Will Hays recommended *Kongo* not be filmed at all, but MGM bought the property, changed the title and character names, and excised references to abortion, drugs, miscegenation, and venereal disease. What remained was still unsuitable for the squeamish: adultery, prostitution, alcoholism, bloodthirsty savages, and a monomaniacal magician

Co-presented by MiDNiTES for MANiACS

Phroso, played by Lon Chaney.

Chaney began his film career in 1913 at Universal Pictures. Advancing from uncredited bit parts to featured roles and eventually to stardom, he was signed by the newly merged Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer in 1924. He played the lead in MGM's first production *He Who Gets Slapped* and went on to star in 17 straight hits for the studio. Eight of these

were collaborations with director Tod Browning, and included *The Unholy Three* (1925), in which Chaney crossdresses as a grandmotherly burglar; *The Unknown* (1927), with Chaney as a murderous, armless circus performer; and *West of Zanzibar*.

Browning and Chaney's MGM films have been described by scholar Gregory William Mank as "the most incredible catalogue of vengeance, cruelty, deformity, and sexual aberration in horror history." Small wonder, then, that their efforts drew the attention of the many self-appointed

guardians of morality. *The Unholy Three* was attacked as a "debasement spectacle" at a convention on child welfare. *The Unknown* was lambasted in the press as irredeemably morbid. *West of Zanzibar* became fodder for an ongoing campaign to institute a national censorship regime in the United States.

In 1907, Chicago became the first major city to regulate motion picture content by requiring that films be reviewed by a police censor board. The idea of local censor boards spread across the country and, in the 1910s, state boards proliferated as well. Boards tended to apply arbitrary, unpredictable criteria in issuing prohibitions, basing

decisions on vaguely defined "community standards" as well as on political allegiances and personal interpretations of the films in question.

In 1922, frustrated film companies banded together to self-police their content, organizing the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America, headed by former Postmaster General Will Hays. Performing a delicate balancing act,

Hays was charged with appeasing the profit-minded studio heads on the one hand, and, on the other, calming the politicians and religious leaders who demanded that Hollywood clean up its act. In 1924, Hays issued "The Formula," guidelines for turning notoriously scandalous books and plays into films. Intended to prevent such adaptations, his "Formula" was easily circumvented by a change of title and other cosmetic details. Thus *Rain* became *Sadie Thompson* (1928) and *Kongo* became *West of Zanzibar*.

Then, in 1927, Hays devised "The Don'ts and Be Carefuls," a list of 11 screen taboos, from "pointed profanity" and nudity to "scenes of childbirth" and "ridicule of the clergy." Despite all these edicts, Hays was essentially powerless to enforce his recommendations if the producers disagreed.

For crusaders like Canon William Shaefe Chase, an Episcopal clergyman from Brooklyn, these measures were insufficient. Chase joined Senator Smith Brookhart in pressuring the U.S. Congress to pass the Brookhart Bill designed to free independent theaters from the studio's blockbooking practices, which moralists felt forced theaters to screen films that went against "community

standards." As ammunition in this campaign, Chase quoted the *Harrison's Reports* review of *West of Zanzibar*, which concluded: "If you run *West of Zanzibar*, you will run it at the peril of alienating many of your regular customers. Demand that it be taken off your contract." In spite of the campaign against it, *West of Zanzibar* was a commercial success, domestically and abroad. Chaney was voted the biggest male box office draw in 1928 and 1929 by American theater owners. The Brookhart Bill was ultimately rejected. Hays, however, convinced producers that only a code with specific, enforceable guidelines would silence the high-profile outrage against their product. Known as the Hays Code, it was enacted in 1930 and enforced from 1934 until 1967.

West of Zanzibar also stirred up censorship issues in Tanganyika, the British colony west of Zanzibar (the two countries now form Tanzania). According to historian James R. Brennan, the picture was denounced as misrepresenting Africa as the "Heart of Darkness." "Just as British or American films require control before exhibition in front of Africans," wrote the editor of the *Tanganyika Times*, "so is it just as necessary to have a proper censorship of films from Africa intended for exhibition in those civilized countries." Tanganyika already enforced a multi-tiered censorship system in which films were passed for all races, for "non-native only," or banned completely. African blacks may not have had the chance to see how Hollywood portrayed them.

In the United States, African Americans typically saw films in separate theaters, separate sections of the theater, or at separate screening times, called "midnight rambles," courtesy of racist Jim Crow laws. Lon Chaney pictures often featured particularly large numbers of African American extras, who were normally paid five to fifteen dollars per

day. *West of Zanzibar* included approximately 200 black actors, nearly all of them uncredited extras. Even Chaney's childhood playmate Noble Johnson, co-founder of an all-black film production company and character actor in dozens of top Hollywood productions, performed in it without screen credit.

Throughout his career, Lon Chaney embraced provocative material. We can only speculate how his choice of roles would have changed under the Hays Code, as he died of lung cancer shortly after its official adoption. *Zanzibar's* director struggled

to maintain his reputation as the "Edgar Allan Poe of the Cinema" under the new censorship regime. In 1931, Browning made the popular *Dracula* with Bela Lugosi at Universal, but few of his subsequent films met with success. *Freaks* (1932) was heavily cut, then poorly received upon release. In the crucial

British export market, it was banned outright for three decades. When Browning tried to set *The Witch of Timbuctoo* in Africa, a London censor nixed the script for fear it might incite revolt among blacks in the British Empire. All references to Africa were removed from what became Browning's penultimate picture, *The Devil Doll* (1936).

MGM remade *West of Zanzibar* in 1932 as *Kongo*. Walter Huston reprised his Broadway role in the talkie, which also restored characters and taboo themes that Browning had eliminated. It failed to draw audiences and is rarely seen today. When Universal's Chaney biopic *Man of a Thousand Faces* was released in 1957, it only briefly mentioned the actor's work with Browning, a collaboration that today defines them both. In the 1970s, after the Hays Code was abandoned in favor of MPAA ratings, *West of Zanzibar* was finally given new life, appearing on television and burning itself into the consciousness of generations of Lon Chaney fans. —BRIAN DARR



Tortured torturer: Lon Chaney as Dead Legs



Tod Browning surrounded by his cast on the set of *Freaks*

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About the San Francisco Silent Film Festival

The 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 invited to San Francisco to restore a rare short film or selected film footage at Monaco Digital Film Labs. The fellow then returns to the Festival the following year to attend the world premiere of the preserved film.

Donations made to the Silent Film Preservation Fellowship Fund help a recently trained preservationist gain essential hands-on experience restoring rare footage in a professional film lab.

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Special, Special Thanks

Kevin Brownlow, California Historical Society (Darlene Plumtree Nolte), Melissa Chittick, Dennis Doros, Tracey Goessel Doyle, Jesse Hawthorne Ficks, Film Preservation Associates (David Shepard), Flicker Alley (Jeffrey Massina), Thomas Gladysz, Amy Heller, Laura Horak, Dennis James, Annike Kross, Roberto Landazuri, Martin and Osa Johnson Safari Museum (Jacquelyn Borgeson and Conrad Froehlich), Nederlands Filmmuseum Library, Tim Lanza, Tom Luddy, Leonard Maltin, Russell Merritt, Gary Meyer, Richard J. Meyer, Peter Moore, Pacific Film Archive, Gary Palmucci, Christy Pascoe, Stephen Salmons, Todd Wiener



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