SAN FRANCISCO

SILENT FILM FESTIVAL



Castro Theatre, San Francisco

July 14–17, 2011



MUSICIANS IN RESIDENCE



Alloy Orchestra

Alloy Orchestra is a three man musical ensemble, writing and performing live accompaniment to classic silent films. Working with an outrageous assemblage of peculiar objects, they thrash and grind soulful music from unlikely sources. Founded 20 years ago, Alloy has scored 23 feature length silent films and more than 30 shorts. The group has helped revive some of the great masterpieces of the silent era by touring extensively, commissioning new prints, and collaborating with archives, collectors and curators.



Stephen Horne

Stephen Horne has long been considered one of the leading silent film accompanists. He is based at London's BFI Southbank, but plays at all the major UK venues and numerous international festivals in Europe and North America. Although principally a pianist, he often incorporates flute, accordion and keyboards into his performances, sometimes simultaneously. In the past year, Stephen has recorded several scores for the forthcoming Treasures From American Archives 5.



Dennis James

For over forty years Dennis James has performed historically authentic silent film score accompaniments utilizing the actual published musical source materials from the silent film era while incorporating the actual period performance practices with unwavering professional commitment to stylistic integrity. He tours internationally with his Silent Film Concerts production company performing to silent films with solo organ, piano, and chamber ensemble accompaniments in addition to presentations with major symphony orchestras throughout the world.



Matti Bye Ensemble

Matti Bye has been a music score composer and live silent movie piano performer at the Swedish Film Institute since 1989. He is also a regular performer at European film festivals, including the Pordenone Silent Film Festival, the Bologna Film Festival, the Berlin International Film Festival, and the Midnight Sun Film Festival in Sodankylä, Finland. The Ensemble includes Bye, Lotta Johansson, Kristian Holmgren, Mattias Olsson. Guest performers include Sarah Jo Zaharako, Alex Kelly, and Lisa Mezzacappa.



Mont Alto Motion Picture Orchestra

The Mont Alto Motion Picture Orchestra is a quintet based in Colorado that revives the sound of the silent film orchestra. Using an extensive library of "photoplay music" that once belonged to movie theater orchestra leaders, Mont Alto compiles film scores by carefully selecting music to suit each scene in the film. The ensemble—cellist David Short, clarinetist Brian Collins, trumpeter Dawn Kramer, pianist Rodney Sauer, and violinist Britt Swenson is versatile enough to play music ranging from Tchaikovsky to the Charleston.



Donald Sosin

Donald Sosin scores films for major festivals, archives and for DVD. San Francisco Silent Film Festival performances include *Lady of the Pavements* with his wife Joanna Seaton, *Prince Achmed,* and many shorts. In February the San Francisco Chamber Orchestra premiered his octet for Harold Lloyd's *Now of Never.* Other commissions: Chicago Symphony Chorus, Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra, MoMA, TCM. Donald is the proud father of Nick, RPI class of 2011, and baby Mollie, an emerging pianist/drummer/singer. They live in Connecticut.



Giovanni Spinelli

Born in England and raised in London, New York, Stockholm and Florence, Spinelli lives and works in New York City. His multicultural background is reflected in his music with influences as diverse as Arvo Pärt, Astor Piazzolla, John Adams, Brian Eno, Ryuchi Sakamoto, Joy Division, Radiohead, Interpol, and Sigur Rós, among others. The diversity of his music, which ranges from orchestral to ambient and electronica and from rock and pop to world music and from rock and pop to world music, is reflected in his work for film and theatre.

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Opening Night Presentation
Live Accompaniment by the Donald Sosin Ensemble

9:15 pm SUNRISE
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FRIDAY, JULY 15

11:00 am AMAZING TALES FROM THE ARCHIVES: The Archivist as Detective
Special Guest Presenters: Jan-Christopher Horak, Anthony L'Abbate, Melissa Levesque
Live Piano Accompaniment by Stephen Horne

2:00 pm HUCKLEBERRY FINN
Live Piano Accompaniment by Donald Sosin

4:15 pm I WAS BORN, BUT...
Live Piano Accompaniment by Stephen Horne

7:00 pm THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE
Live Accompaniment by the Matti Bye Ensemble

9:30 pm IL FUOCO
Live Piano Accompaniment by Stephen Horne

SATURDAY, JULY 16

10:00 am WALT DISNEY'S LAUGH-O-GRAMS
Live Piano Accompaniment by Donald Sosin

12:00 noon VARIATIONS ON A THEME: Musicians on the Craft of Composing and Performing for Silent Film
With all the festival musicians, moderated by Jill Tracy

2:00 pm THE BLIZZARD
Live Piano Accompaniment by the Matti Bye Ensemble

4:00 pm THE GOOSE WOMAN
Silent Film Festival Award: UCLA Film and Television Archive
Live Piano Accompaniment by Stephen Horne

6:30 pm MR. FIX-IT
Accompaniment by Dennis James on the Mighty Wurlitzer

8:30 pm THE WOMAN MEN YEARN FOR
Centerpiece Presentation
Live Accompaniment by Mont Alto Motion Picture Orchestra

SUNDAY, JULY 17

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Live Piano Accompaniment by Stephen Horne

12:00 noon SHOES
Accompaniment by Dennis James on the Mighty Wurlitzer

2:00 pm WILD AND WEIRD: Short Film Favorites
Live Accompaniment by the Alloy Orchestra

4:30 pm THE NAIL IN THE BOOT
Live Piano and Accordion Accompaniment by Stephen Horne.

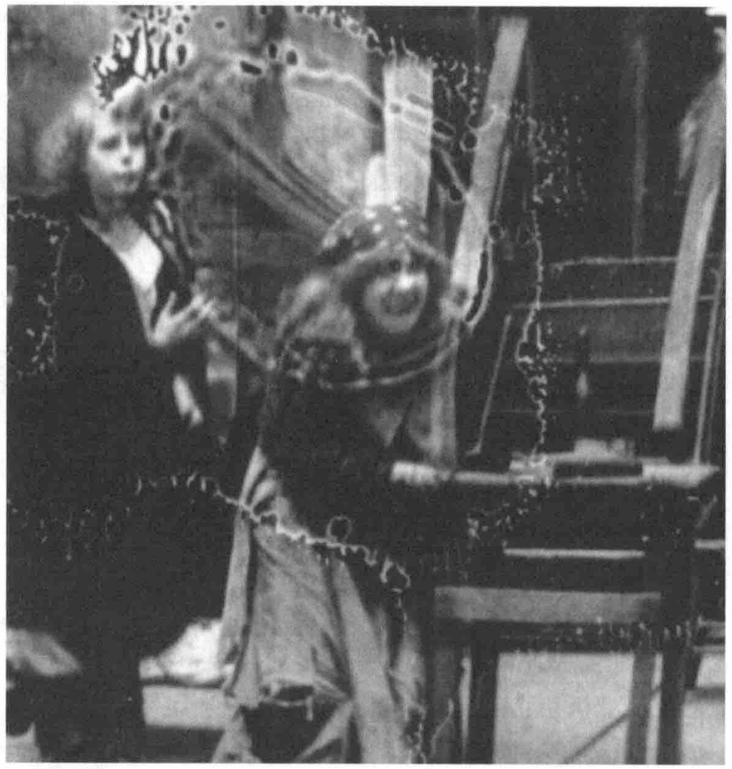
7:30 pm HE WHO GETS SLAPPED
Closing Night Presentation
Directors Pick—Introduced by Alexander Payne
Live Accompaniment by the Matti Bye Ensemble

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SILENT FILM, ORPHAN FILM

Saving, Studying, and Screening Neglected Cinema

by Dan Streible



The Two Orphans (1911)

Image courtesy of the Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater

A fragment of Wallace Reid's otherwise lost western *The Tribal Outlaw* (Bison 101, 1912). The charming eight-minute narrative that tries to explain the inspiration for Beethoven's *Moonlight Sonata* (1909). William and Irene Finley's playful wildlife film, *Chumming with Chipmunks* (1921). These are some of the orphan films showing throughout the festival, preserved by archivists and scholars who recognized these motion pictures for their documentary and aesthetic values. What is an orphan film? Simply put, it is a work either abandoned by its legal owner or whose copyright status cannot be determined. Yet a growing alliance among archives, artists, and academics conceives of any film that has suffered neglect (physical, cultural, historical) as an orphan in need of adoption if it is to be saved, studied, and screened. "Orphans" come from a realm of motion pictures more populous than the conventional movie kingdom. They include newsreels, outtakes, amateur films, test reels, kinescopes, trailers, and promotional, local, and experimental films, as well as early silent narratives and even fragments recovered from works so far removed from their original context as to be nearly indecipherable (see *Madison News Reel,* screening before *The Nail in the Boot*).

In the very late 20th century, about the time San Francisco was launching its Silent Film Festival and welcoming the National Film Preservation Foundation (NFPF) to the city, "orphan film" became a colloquialism among archivists. As early as 1992, UCLA restoration expert Robert Gitt told the *Los Angeles Times* that archives were recognizing orphan films as the new and bigger challenge for film preservation. A year later, the phrase peppered the public hearings that preceded the Library of Congress report, *Redefining Film Preservation: A National Plan* (1994), which formally categorized orphan films as the at-risk problem children for archives. In 1997, the NFPF began to champion films "outside the scope of commercial preservation," funding preservation of and access to all kinds of nearly forgotten motion pictures.

Then, just before the 20th century expired, the first Orphan Film Symposium was held at the University of South Carolina in 1999. The event brought together 90 archivists and preservation experts with film historians, scholars, and curators, as well as media artists who make new work out of archival footage. In the ensuing decade, each

biennial symposium has grown larger and more international than the last. In 2006, New York University adopted the Orphan Film Symposium, integrating it into its year-round Moving Image Archiving and Preservation master's program.

Silent cinema is a core part of the orphan film phenomenon. The oldest films suffer most from physical deterioration. Silent movies are often no longer under copyright and therefore available for archives, researchers, collectors, and artists to do with as they please. Silent films pique the interest of cinephiles across generations and those fascinated by the four decades of history recorded in these mute time capsules. A look at the program from the first Orphan Film Symposium indicates the importance of silents to the movement. The Museum of Modern Art showed its restoration of D.W. Griffith's *The Lonedale Operator* (1912) and its restoration-in-progress of Oscar Micheaux's rediscovered *The Symbol of the Unconquered* (1920). The Library of Congress screened samples of its 35mm renovation of the Paper Print Collection and gave a presentation on how they were being curated for Internet access. Scholars presented papers on serials in the teens, pre-1917 Russian films later overshadowed by Soviet productions, and films sponsored by communities in North Dakota to encourage migration to the state in the 1910s and '20s.

The Two Orphans (Selig, 1911) also screened at the 1999 inaugural symposium. This three-reel melodrama cum American *film d'art* had been recently preserved by the Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research. Images of its 35mm frames showing nitrate decay still circulate to represent the urgency of film preservation. The film's source was a popular 1874 French play, *Les deux orphelines*, most notably made into D.W. Griffith's epic feature *Orphans of the Storm* (1921), starring Lillian and Dorothy Gish. Griffith was at least the sixth filmmaker to adapt the story. The rest of the known adaptations have apparently ended up in orphan film heaven: William Haggar's *Duel Scene from "The Two Orphans"* (1902, U.K.); a 1907 French Pathé version; Selig Polyscope's lone survivor from 1907, starring Kathlyn Williams; another Pathé adaptation, released in the U.S. as *Motherless* (1910); Fox Film's 1915 feature-length Theda Bara vehicle; and a completed German production (1920–21) that disappeared when Griffith himself bought the rights and kept it out of distribution so as not to compete with his big Gish picture.

ARCHIVES ARE NOT PLACES WHERE FILMS GO TO DIE.

But silent film as "orphan" is not just about what we have lost. Instead, the orphan film movement shares the philosophy promoted by San Franciscan Rick Prelinger, a collector of thousands of ephemeral films (including the wondrous 1924 *Tribune-American Dream Picture*), that archives are not where films go to die but are resources for continuing renewal and reconsideration of the past. A practitioner of this creed is the New York-based media artist Bill Morrison, who has become an unofficial cine-poet laureate of orphan films, drawing attention to silent-era nitrate film and its decay. His short *The Film of Her* (1996) uses dozen of fragments that survived only as paper prints deposited for copyright at the Library of Congress. In this experimental narrative, he transforms the LOC's Howard Lamarr Walls into a cinematic dreamer motivated to locate an unnamed film of a woman he once saw in his youth. Morrison's work with archives culminated in the 2002 feature-length *Decasia*, a collection of beautifully decaying fragments, which garnered a large audience unprecedented for an avant-garde work, aiding the cause of film preservation.

After more than a decade of filtering films through the orphan rubric, "orphanistas" agree that these works are valuable beyond the kind of entertainment offered by commercial features, silent or otherwise. Most are short, predominantly nonfiction, and often fragmentary. Newsfilm, footage made for newsreels, is another type of orphan film. It survives in millions of pieces around the world, most of it unpreserved. Five pieces screening at the festival come from the Fox Movietone News Collection at the University of South Carolina, three of which were preserved in partnership with the Orphan Film Symposium. Some are rare glimpses of historical figures, including the not-yet-famous Charles Lindbergh, filmed because he was delivering Fox newsreels via airmail. Two presidents' wives also make appearances. *Mrs. Harding, "Cameraman"?* (1922) makes a joke of the First Lady operating a 35mm camera, while, in *Coolidge Trapshooting* (1928), Grace Coolidge "shoots" her husband with a Cine-Kodak 16mm home movie camera. Such films offer delightful surprises and always expand our historical knowledge. As with *Music for the Silent Newsreels* (1930), they can also serve as primary documents in the history of silent cinema itself. Collectively, orphan films comprise an eclectic and vast body of works, one that creates new views on what cinema was, from the silent era on.

Dan Streible directs the Orphan Film Project and its biennial symposium. He is associate professor of cinema studies at New York University, where he also works with its Moving Image Archiving and Preservation master's degree program.



A very young Charles Lindbergh (Image courtesy of University of Southern Carolina Moving Image Research Collections)

THE FILMS

Chosen by Dan Streible, these fragments, newsfilm outtakes, and other celluloid treasures screening at select programs throughout the festival represent only a portion of the kinds of orphan films out loose in the world.

Program: SUNRISE

Fox News Story C1282: **F.W. Murnau and George O'Brien Leaving Paris for Berlin** (August 31, 1927) Outtake courtesy of University of South Carolina, Fox Movietone News Collection, 3 minutes

Program: HUCKLEBERRY FINN

Fox News Story 4641: **Mrs. Harding, "Cameraman"?** (April 8, 1922) and Fox Movietone News Story 1-535: **Coolidge Trapshooting** (December 1, 1928) Outtakes courtesy of University of South Carolina, Fox Movietone News Collection, 1.5 minutes

Program: I WAS BORN, BUT...

Fox News Story B1998: **St. Louis to Chicago Airmail** (April 10, 1926) The cameraman's four-year-old son delivers a box of newsfilm to the pilot—a then-unknown Charles Lindbergh. Outtake courtesy of University of South Carolina, Fox Movietone News Collection, 4 minutes

Program: IL FUOCO

Origin of Beethoven's "Moonlight Sonata" (Edison, 1909) A narrative enactment of the composer's inspiration for his famous sonata. Courtesy of Library of Congress, AFI Collection, 8 minutes

Program: VARIATIONS ON A THEME

Fox Movietone News Story 5-484: **Music for the Silent Newsreels** (March 11, 1930) Sound film of pianist Harry Rosenthal playing for different types of silent-era newsfilms. Courtesy of University of South Carolina, Fox Movietone News Collection, 4 minutes

Program: THE BLIZZARD

The Tribal Law (Bison 101, 1912) Action-packed fragment from an otherwise lost Wallace Reid film. Courtesy of University of South Carolina, Elmer Richardson Collection, 6 minutes

Program: MR. FIX-IT

Chumming with Chipmunks (Goldwyn-Bray Pictograph, 1921) William and Irene Finley's playful wildlife film. Courtesy of David Shepard, Film Preservation Associates, 5 minutes

Program: SHOES

Tribune-American Dream Picture (1924) The winning entry in the *Oakland Tribune* and American Theatre contest for the most unusual dream was made into this short film. Courtesy of Library of Congress, Prelinger Archives, 7 minutes

Program: THE NAIL IN THE BOOT

Madison News Reel (c. 1932) A mysterious, clever collage with home-made intertitles referencing citizens of Madison, Maine. Courtesy of Northeast Historic Film, 3 minutes



Courtesy of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences

UPSTREAM

Live Accompaniment by the Donald Sosin Ensemble

CAST: Nancy Nash (Gertie Ryan), Earle Foxe (Eric Brashingham), Grant Withers (Jack La Velle/The knife thrower), Lydia Yeamans Titus (Miss Hattie Breckenbridge/The landlady), Emile Chautard (Campbell-Mandare), Raymond Hitchcock (The Star Boarder), Ted McNamara, Sammy Cohen (Callahan & Callahan), Judy King, Lillian Worth (Sister team dancers), Jane Winton (The soubrette), Harry Bailey (Gus Hoffman), Francis Ford (The juggler), Ely Reynolds (Deerfoot) DIRECTOR: John Ford PRODUCTION: Fox Film Corporation 1927 PRODUCER: William Fox SCENARIO: Randall H. Faye, based on the short story "The Snake's Wife" by Wallace Smith PHOTOGRAPHY: Charles G. Clarke PRINT SOURCE: Academy Film Archive, courtesy of 20th Century Fox and Criterion Pictures, USA

Preceded by: **WHY HUSBANDS FLIRT**, a Christie Comedies production from 1918, starring "Smiling" Billy Mason and Ethel Lynne, as Constance, his wife. Produced by Al Christie and directed by William Beaudine. Story by Robert N. Johnson and photographed by Ross Fisher. Print courtesy of George Eastman House.

Most filmgoers think of John Ford primarily as a director of westerns, with 1939's *Stagecoach* as his first important film. However, of Ford's more than 140 titles, only about a third are westerns and nearly half are silents of which only 15 percent survive. The discovery in 2009 of a complete print of *Upstream* in New Zealand provides an unexpected opportunity to observe the nascent Ford style and the emergence of themes and techniques that are now signature marks of this great director.

Ford's early career, described by critic Tag Gallagher as his apprenticeship years, was dominated by his older brother Francis Ford and cowboy actor Harry Carey. In 1914, Francis, a successful actor who wrote and directed his own star vehicles at Universal, gave Ford his start as his assistant. The younger Ford learned the fundamentals of filmmaking, working as everything from an actor and stuntman to a camera operator. In 1917, Ford stepped out of his brother's shadow with his first solo directing assignment. Ford later claimed that studio chief Carl Laemmle promoted him to director in 1915 after Ford replaced a director too hung over to work. As part of the shoot, Ford staged a stunt-filled western action sequence for invited studio guests. "They thought it was great," Ford told Peter Bogdanovich in 1971. "They had a picture coming up with Harry Carey and they had no director. Mr. Laemmle says, 'That Jack Ford, he yells real loud. He'd make a good director.'" While Ford spun a good yarn, his promotion most likely came two years later on *The Tornado*, in which he himself starred, not Harry Carey.



Courtesy of AMPAS

Nancy Nash and Grant Withers, knife-throwing team

Ford considered *The Soul Herder* (1917), the first in his four-year collaboration with Harry Carey, his real debut as a director. His brother described it as "a little gem," going on to say: "Jack was no good until he was given something to do on his own where he could let himself go—and he proved himself then." In the 24 subsequent films he made with Carey he did "let himself go," with the support of his star who encouraged Ford to inject his own sense of humor into their films. He also began to add humanistic touches. In the climax of *Straight Shooting* (1917), for example, a seemingly redeemed outlaw helps Carey save a family besieged by bad guys but then samples and steals a jar of the family's jam.

After establishing himself at Universal, Ford moved to Fox in 1920, lured by bigger budgets and a wider variety of story material. He began to work in multiple genres—westerns, melodramas, and romances—combining his craftsmanship with flashes of artistic ambition. The combination paid off with *The Iron Horse* (1924), a historical epic about the building of the transcontinental railroad, which grossed $2 million dollars and earned Ford a reputation as a leading American director.

At Fox, he encountered his third major influence, the films of German émigré F.W. Murnau, whose 1927 masterpiece *Sunrise* also marked a turning point for the studio. After seeing rushes of the film still in post-production, Ford told a reporter from *Moving Picture World* that he "believed [*Sunrise*] to be the greatest picture that had been produced." In February 1927, Ford traveled to Germany to shoot footage for *Four Sons* (1928), a melodrama about a Bavarian mother who loses all but one of her sons in the Great War. While little or none of the actual footage was used, the trip allowed Ford to see several German expressionist films and to spend time with Murnau.

The impact of *Sunrise* is evident in Ford's subsequent silents for Fox. In *Four Sons*, shot on *Sunrise*'s sets, he follows the characters' movements with the camera in a way rarely seen in his previous work. While Ford returned to the static wide shot in his later films, he reserved the moving camera for moments of great import. Murnau's influence can also be seen in *Hangman's House* (1928), Ford's atmospheric drama set in Ireland. *Variety* critic Alfred Rushford Grearson credited the film for "some of the most striking touches of

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of composition seen on the screen since those swampland shots in *Sunrise*, which they often resemble."

Upstream, released a month before Ford's trip to Germany, does not yet reflect what he learned from Murnau but does hint at Ford's later style in other ways. Set among vaudevillians living in a boardinghouse, *Upstream* depicts a collection of diverse characters coming together as a community, a common Ford theme. *Upstream*'s love triangle among the knife-thrower Jack, his love interest Gertie, and the egotistical aspiring actor Brashingham also serves as a framework for a series of amusing and touching vignettes that reveal the personalities of the boarders. He famously reprises this method of character development in *Stagecoach*, with the travelers crammed together for their journey—the teetotaler whiskey salesman clutching his wares from the drunken doctor and the married lady who prefers not to sit near the prostitute.

While Ford was expanding his artistic repertoire, William Fox was expanding his studio in an effort to compete with the likes of MGM and develop a global reach. As a result, *Upstream* circulated internationally, getting released as faraway as New Zealand. In the silent era, studios ordered the destruction of all film prints at the end of their theatrical runs rather than incur the expense of shipping them back, especially from a foreign address. Luckily, not all exhibitors complied, and occasionally projectionists or theater managers hung on to prints or sold them to collectors.

This was the case with the presumed lost *Upstream*. In 1993, it was donated to the New Zealand Film Archive by the grandson of a former projectionist who kept dozens of nitrate prints in his garden shed. The NZFA, primarily dedicated to saving and archiving the works of New Zealand filmmakers, stored *Upstream* but left it untouched for 16 years. In 2009, while on holiday in New Zealand, Brian Meacham, a preservationist for the Academy Film Archive in Los Angeles, visited the archive and ended up discussing the possibility of repatriating American films in the archive's collection with Steve Russell, the manager of corporate services. Russell later sent a list of holdings to him. Back in Los Angeles, Meacham noticed many valuable titles, including some reels of an early Clara Bow feature *Maytime* (1923), *Won in a Cupboard* (1914), the first surviving film directed by Mabel Normand, and something called *Upstream*. It wasn't until Meacham returned to New Zealand with National Film Preservation Foundation consultant Leslie Ann Lewis and unwound the print on a bench that they knew for sure what they had.

UPSTREAM was found in the garden shed of a former projectionist in New Zealand.

As the only print in existence, *Upstream* was restored in New Zealand rather than risk shipping it home. A few small sections of the print had severe nitrate decomposition but, on the whole, the damage was minor and the tinted sections had retained their colors. In September 2010, the restored *Upstream* premiered in Los Angeles to a sold-out crowd. Brian Meacham described his reaction to seeing the rediscovered film on the big screen for the first time: "It was significant because it was a Ford film, but it also happens to be a good film. Audiences love it. I think they would love it whether or not they knew it was a John Ford film."

–Anne Hockens

Anne Hockens is director of communications for the Film Noir Foundation. She regularly contributes articles to the foundation's magazine Noir City *and edits its news page.*



SUNRISE: A Song of Two Humans

Live Solo Electric Guitar Accompaniment by Giovanni Spinelli

CAST: George O'Brien (The Man), Janet Gaynor (The Wife), Margaret Livingston (The Woman from the City), Bodil Rosing (The Maid), J. Farrell MacDonald (The Photographer), Ralph Sipperly (The Barber), Jane Winton (The Manicure Girl), Arthur Housman (The Obtrusive Gentleman), Eddie Boland (The Obliging Gentleman) PRODUCTION: Fox Film Corporation 1927 PRODUCER: William Fox DIRECTOR: F.W. Murnau SCENARIO: Carl Mayer, based on Hermann Sudermann's "The Journey to Tilsit" from his Lithuanian Stories TITLES: Katherine Hilliker, H.H. Caldwell PHOTOGRAPHY: Charles Rosher, Karl Struss ART DIRECTION: Rochus Gliese EDITORS: Katherine Hilliker, H.H. Caldwell, Harold D. Schuster PRINT SOURCE: Criterion Pictures

Preceded by an outtake from the orphan film **F.W. MURNAU AND GEORGE O'BRIEN LEAVING PARIS FOR BERLIN** (1927)

Historian William K. Everson dubbed 1927 "the absolute zenith of the art of the silent film." *Metropolis*, from Germany, and *Napoleon*, from France, are noteworthy enough to mark the year as significant. But that September also saw the release of *Sunrise: A Song of Two Humans*, F.W. Murnau's celebrated first American feature. Imported from Germany by William Fox to lend his studio prestige, director Murnau had been given unprecedented carte blanche to make the film. He built a village on the shores of Lake Arrowhead and a marshland at the Los Angeles studio, complete with two moons, as well as spent more than five months in production at a time when quickly made "programmers" were the bulk of Fox's output. Murnau brought with him all the innovative techniques he had developed making his previous 17 films. Chiaroscuro lighting effects

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evoked mood and characters' state of mind. His *entfesselte kamera* (unchained camera) meandered in long unedited takes throughout elaborate sets notable for, among other things, an impressive depth of field. The trade press followed the making of the film, relishing the production's high cost. In February of that year, more than six months before the world saw *Sunrise*, even the *New York Times* saw fit to report about the film's enormous sets: "Fox builds city a mile and a half wide." When the movie finally made its world premiere on September 23 at New York's Times Square Theatre, the big-name director was not even in the audience.



Born Friedrich Wilhelm Plumpe in 1888 into a middle-class family in Bielefeld, Murnau studied philology and art at the University of Heidelberg, later abandoning school to become an actor. Eventually settling in Berlin, he gravitated like many adventurous artists of his day to Max Reinhardt's Deutsches Theater, playing roles in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and Karl Vollmoeller's *The Miracle*. In 1919, after serving in the German infantry and air force during World War I, he directed his first two pictures. *Der Knabe in blau* (*The Boy in Blue*) was made with a Deutsches Theater colleague, and the episodic *Santanas* was a collaboration with Robert Wiene, whose *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920) heralded the arrival of expressionist cinema the following year. For his *Nosferatu: A Symphony of Horrors* (1922), Murnau adapted Bram Stoker's 1897 novel *Dracula* and fused the palettes of Gothic, romantic, and abstract expressionist painting styles. But it was the purely visual storytelling of *The Last Laugh* (1924) with its single intertitle and its use of an inventive tracking camera to convey the downtrodden psyche of a demoted doorman that brought Murnau worldwide acclaim and an invitation from William Fox.

Fox had great ambitions for his studio. He began busily scooping up theater chains in 1925, expanding his West Coast operation, and investing in a sound-on-film process invented by Theodore Case. To fill his newly acquired movie palace screens with quality pictures, he cultivated homegrown talent, counting Raoul Walsh, John Ford, and Frank Borzage among his top directors. After seeing *The Last Laugh* at a preview screening held in New York before its Berlin premiere, he enticed Murnau to America with a six-figure salary and the promise of complete creative control.

The night of *Sunrise*'s New York opening, Murnau's film was not the only attraction. Rather than the usual stage shows and live orchestral accompaniment that splashy premieres entailed in the silent era, the evening instead promised an "all-sound program" courtesy of Movietone technology. *The Cadets at West Point*, the first Movietone short subject, had screened for the New York press in February. In May, the Movietone crew filmed the sight and simultaneous sound of Lindberg taking off on his historic trans-Atlantic flight and rushed back to the lab to develop the footage. That same night at the Roxy Theatre, the audience gave the newsreel a ten-minute standing ovation.

For *Sunrise*'s unveiling, the studio commissioned a sound-on-film score that included crowd noises, clanging bells, and a blowing storm. Before the feature, the audience saw freshly minted Movietone short subjects: the Vatican Choir singing, a military parade (with band), and a speech urging international peace delivered partly in English by Italian dictator Benito Mussolini. The October 1 issue of *Moving Picture World* devoted an entire review to the 20-minute newsreel. "What impressed the audience most at the opening of Fox's *Sunrise* ... was not so much the fine picture made by Fred W. Murnau ... as it was the Movietone accompaniment for the picture and the Movietone scenes ... which preceded the main feature. ... The perfection of the synchronization of sound and picture has at last been attained and hereafter anyone who doubts the future of this form of entertainment must be classified with those who thought that the 'movie' was only a passing amusement for children and folks of inferior mental capacity."

After completing *Sunrise*, Murnau returned to Germany to fulfill an obligation to Ufa, which required he direct one more film. From *Nine from Nine* was never made, but Murnau, released from his contract, extended his visit home, missing the much-hyped New York premiere. He did return in time for *Sunrise*'s West Coast premiere on November 29 at the Carthay Circle Theatre. The star-studded evening featured a live orchestral score prepared by conductor Carli Elinor, who had built a reputation as musical director for high-profile premieres such as *The Gold Rush*, *The Big Parade*, and *What Price Glory*. In addition to fellow Fox director Frank Borzage, whose *7th Heaven* had already demonstrated Murnau's powerful impact on the Fox lot, the audience reportedly included Clara Bow, Clarence Brown, Joan Crawford, Dolores Del Rio, Hal Roach, Norma Shearer, and Irving Thalberg. The crowd burst into applause after the film's stunning camera effects.

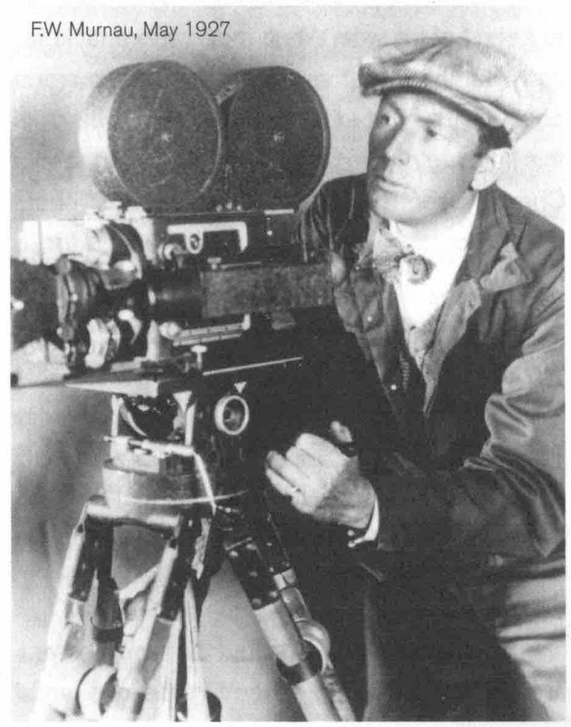
As it turned out, 1927 was also the zenith of Murnau's career. After *Sunrise*'s record-breaking expense and anemic box-office returns, Fox encouraged the director, now signed to a four-year contract, to limit the budget and scale of his next projects. The specter of sound also haunted his final works. Both *4 Devils* (1929), about a family of circus acrobats, and *Our Daily Bread* (1930, released as *City Girl*), set on a wheat farm, were partially reshot to fill the pressing demand for talking pictures. Film scholar Janet Bergstrom says that 25 percent of *4 Devils* and about half of *City Girl* include new dialogue scenes made without Murnau's participation.

While the entire industry was frantically converting to talkies, Murnau was far from studio control, working on an independent silent production with *Nanook of the North* director Robert Flaherty. Their 18-month adventure in French Polynesia resulted in Murnau's last film. *Tabu* premiered March 19, 1931, one week after the director sustained fatal injuries from a car crash along the Pacific Coast highway. Both silent film and one of its leading artists were dead. Eleven people, including Greta Garbo, attended his wake in Los Angeles. His body was shipped back to Berlin, where fellow German director Fritz Lang offered a final, prescient farewell: "Many centuries hence everyone would know that a pioneer left us in the midst of his career."

–Shari Kizirian

A writer and editor based in Rio de Janeiro, Shari Kizirian coedits the Silent Film Festival program book.

F.W. Murnau, May 1927



THE CURATOR *and the* COMPOSER

Creating a New Song for Two Humans



Courtesy of Joseph Yranski

Behind the film's artistry, technical innovations, and outsize budget, *Sunrise* is ultimately the story of two people. A woman from the city takes her summer holiday in a quaint lakeside village, has an affair with a married man, and convinces him to get rid of his wife. When the man is unable to carry out the plan, the real story—of the married couple's attempt at reconciliation—begins. It is this intimate nature of *Sunrise* that curator Paolo Cherchi Usai had in mind when he asked composer Giovanni Spinelli to write new music for the film.

Cherchi Usai, current director of the Haghefilm Foundation in Amsterdam and cofounder and codirector of Le Giornate del Cinema Muto, the silent film festival in Pordenone, Italy, says the festival is constantly fielding proposals by musicians who want to play for silents. "Even very talented musicians often don't seem to come to terms with the score as a tool for a dialogue between the film and the music. It has to follow the film, moment after moment. It has to be that." Pordenone tends to favor traditional musical presentations over experimental ones, as new music often falls short. "But the original score," Cherchi Usai says, "is not always the best score."

Recognizing the challenges, especially for a film as well known and beloved as *Sunrise*, he invited his friend Giovanni Spinelli, who has composed scores for several independent features and documentaries, to embark on an experiment. Can a score for silent film reach beyond melodic, classical traditions and still respect the film as a piece of art? Can new music for an old film work? For Pordenone's 2006 festival, Spinelli composed and conducted a score written for piano and a string ensemble to accompany D.W. Griffith's *True Heart Susie* (1919). "A talkie has much more sound than a score," says Spinelli. "It has dialogue, sound effects, ambient sounds. A silent film requires wall-to-wall music. To perform live for a film is the most grueling thing I can imagine for a musician." When Cherchi Usai suggested a *Sunrise* score for solo electric guitar, Spinelli had reservations. An electric guitar, he says, doesn't have the versatility of the piano or strings, which can communicate the broader array of emotions required of a silent score. "With a guitar," says Spinelli, "you basically only make music with one hand. If no one's done it, it's for a good reason."

Both the curator and the composer agreed, however, that a performer alone on stage, facing the movie screen, playing to the film was consistent with the lyrical atmosphere of *Sunrise*. "It's about only two human beings," says Cherchi Usai. "You are alone talking to the movie. The audience is watching you talking to the film." Putting his initial reservations aside, Spinelli accepted the challenge and, for a year and a half, composed while Cherchi Usai critiqued. Early on, Cherchi Usai felt that some of the music did not capture the multiple nuances that a single sequence of film can convey. For the marsh scene, Spinelli attempted a riff with a "sexy, heavy accent." "This is moonlight, seductive, the threat [of the Woman from the City] only has to be suggested. The film is already all chiaroscuro," he says. "There's no need to go that way."

"That was the icebreaker," says Cherchi Usai. "He made me cry."

Cherchi Usai realized the experiment was working when he heard Spinelli's music for the scene in which the Wife serves dinner to her husband. At the same time, the husband is thinking about meeting his lover. "It has to be plaintive but there's also this seduction going on," he says. "That was the icebreaker—when [the music] made me feel like Janet Gaynor, what it feels like to be that woman. He made me cry."

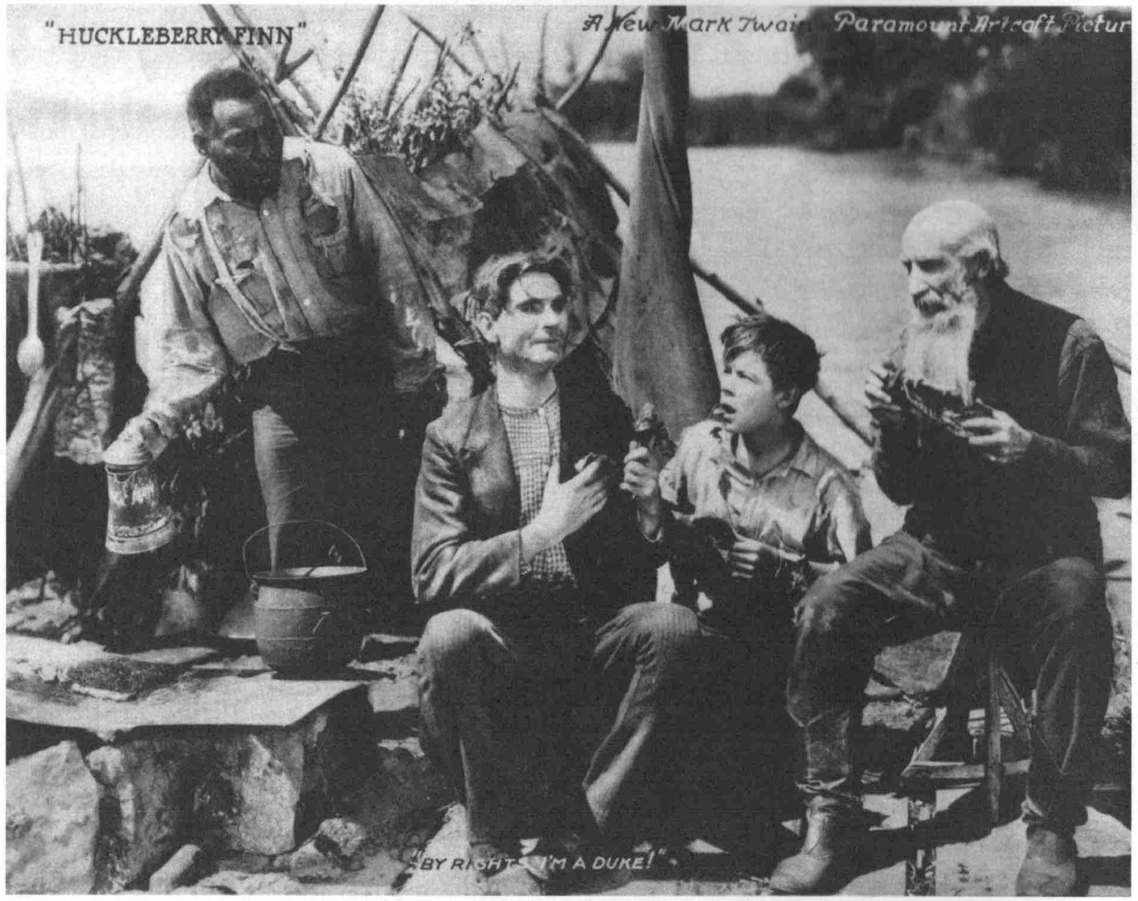
Spinelli built a catalog of minimalist sounds and themes, about ten and a half hours worth, which he will draw on to perform a largely improvised score. When the Man is torn between the passion for the Woman from the City and his sense of duty toward his wife, Spinelli says he "developed a very vaporous, thick wall of sound, which attempts to mimic the Man's heaviness of heart." He describes the Woman in the City's theme as a "wobbly, bubbly yet sinister sound." While his influences for the score are primarily post-punk, he plans on lacing it with some blues, possibly a little reggae and bossa nova, for what he calls "comic relief amid the intense drama." To augment the capacity of the guitar, Spinelli will keep within reach a cello bow, an electric razor, a pivot driver, milk frother, and slide. He will also make ample use of live looping with a series of pedals. "I'll be playing with my feet as much as with my hands," he says.

Audiences respond well to traditional music for silents. It appeals to a sense of nostalgia about the silent era and enforces the perception that this is how these film were meant to be seen. It feels more authentic. Authenticity, says Cherchi Usai, has its value, but does the original music make *Sunrise* better? "Let's be generous and call it charming," he says of the Movietone score, which features a sprinkling of sound effects.

The film premiered in 1927 with two scores: one live (possibly pastiche) score written and conducted by Carli Elinor; and the sound-on-film score—sometimes credited to Samuel "Roxy" Rothafel, sometimes to Hugo Riesenfeld—commissioned to launch Fox's Movietone technology. The Movietone score survives today and is considered the film's authentic accompaniment. Back then, it dazzled as a technological feat, but it also raised some objections. In a 1929 issue of *Music Quarterly*, Harry Alan Potamkin wrote: "Observe how the players, the settings, and the occurrences enter into the unit flow of the film. The Movietone effects are insulting to the purity of this rhythm, just as occasionally the orchestra has deceived us into believing a rhythm occurred before our eyes when it really was apprehended by our ears."

Part of the impetus to write new music is to attract new audiences to silent film—the ever-present conundrum of getting younger generations interested in 100-year-old films. "The type of music in the Movietone score can make it seem antiquated," says Spinelli. "This film is groundbreaking. New music can help it transcend any period." The curator agrees with the composer. "What a truly good score does for a silent film," says Cherchi Usai, "is bring the film closer to us while letting it speak for itself."

—Shari Kizirian



HUCKLEBERRY FINN

Live Piano Accompaniment by Donald Sosin

CAST: Lewis Sargent (Huckleberry Finn), Katherine Griffith (Widow Douglas), Martha Mattox (Miss Watson), Frank Lanning (Huck's father), Orral Humphrey (The Duke), Tom D. Bates (The King), Gordon Griffith (Tom Sawyer), Edythe Chapman (Aunt Polly), Thelma Salter (Becky Thatcher), George Reed (Jim), L.M. Wells (Judge Thatcher), Esther Ralston (Mary Jane Wilks) PRODUCTION: Famous Players-Lasky Corporation 1920 PRODUCER: Jesse L. Lasky DIRECTOR: William D. Taylor SCENARIO: Julia Crawford Ivers, based on the novel by Mark Twain PHOTOGRAPHY: Frank E. Garbutt PRINT SOURCE: George Eastman House

Preceded by outtakes from the orphan films: **MRS. HARDING, "CAMERMAN"?** (1922) and **COOLIDGE TRAPSHOOTING** (1928)

William Desmond Taylor is remembered today more for his unsolved murder in 1922, and the sordid revelations about his private life that followed, than for his once admired film career. So it might come as a surprise to many that this Irish-born director made three well-received films about Mark Twain's all-American boys, Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn. But this trilogy was not all he accomplished.

Taylor directed 40 feature films in seven years. His prolific output did not include epics themes, but that wasn't his intent; he was interested in the intimate moments of the human condition. He believed, above all, in giving his writers the time to work on those details until the script was ready to shoot. In one of his few public statements about his work, published in the *Exhibitors Trade Review* in 1920, he said: "I have always held that a poor story is a waste of time." One writer who fulfilled his trust time and again was Julia Crawford Ivers, who wrote scenarios for 23 of his films, including Taylor's set of films based on the Mark Twain books.

Ivers was a pioneering director and a writer. Few details about her life have been recorded because she shied away from any kind of publicity, even more so than Taylor did. Ivers was already wealthy when she entered the film business, the widow of oil and land baron Oliver Ivers who had died in 1902. Her late husband and Frank Garbutt had been business partners, but it was Garbutt who saw new opportunities in the movie business, investing in Bosworth Incorporated in 1913 and the Oliver Morosco Photoplay Company in 1914. When Garbutt formed Pallas Pictures in 1915, Julia Ivers joined the business, too, writing scenarios for all three companies. When Paramount became the distributor for Morosco and Pallas in 1916, Garbutt took on a powerful position behind the scenes at Paramount.

George Reed played Jim the slave in an age when many black roles were performed by white men in blackface.

William D. Taylor eventually became an important director at Paramount, but his first job in the movies was as an actor for producer and director Thomas Ince in 1913. Taylor began directing in 1914 with the Balboa Amusement Company, and his breakthrough work came at the American Film Company in Santa Barbara, where he took over and finished the popular 30-episode serial *The Diamond from the Sky* (1915). Taylor left for Pallas Pictures in October 1915 and directed *He Fell in Love with His Wife* (1916), his first collaboration with writer Ivers.

From 1916 to 1918, Taylor worked with some of the biggest stars in Hollywood, among them Mary and Jack Pickford, William and Dustin Farnum, Wallace Reid, and Constance Talmadge. While averaging seven films a year, Taylor had his share of flops, but the critics also recognized his talent. *Photoplay* praised *The Parson of Panamint* (1916), with Dustin Farnum, noting that Peter B. Kyne's "novel and its characterizations, were very well preserved." A critic for *Exhibitors Trade Review* wrote that *The Varmint* (1917), with Jack Pickford, was "[b]rimming over with human interest. Clean, wholesome and entertaining." *Variety* pegged *Tom Sawyer* (1917) as "class, wholesome amusement [that] will never grow old." *Photoplay* singled out director Taylor in *Up the Road with Sallie* (1918), which starred Constance Talmadge: "Mr. Taylor has the real comedy sense." Taylor may have stumbled with his first film starring Mary Pickford, *How Could You, Jean?* (1918)—which prompted a lament by one critic, "How Could You, Mary?"—but he bounced back with his second, *Johanna Enlists* (1918), proclaimed by *Variety* "as attractive, refreshing, and original a picture as one would care to see."

World War One halted Taylor's film career, when he enlisted in the British Army, serving from July 1918 to May 1919. Presumably, by the time he left the service, Julia Crawford Ivers had already finished the scenario for *Huckleberry Finn*, because it was immediately ready to go into production as Taylor's first postwar film. No major stars were slated for this film. Although Jack Pickford had played the title role in Taylor's *Tom Sawyer* (1917) and *Huck and Tom* (1918), he had outgrown the part. Taylor was given a free hand in casting roles to match the personalities conjured in Twain's prose. To play Huck Finn, Taylor chose Lewis Sargent, a 15-year-old Los Angeles native with several films to his credit. Edythe Chapman reprised her role as Aunt Polly; she was the only actor to repeat her role from the first two films. Seasoned character actors filled most of the other roles. Notable among these talents was George Reed, who played Jim the slave.

Reed was born in Macon, Georgia, just a year after the Civil War ended. He grew up in the Deep South and became a stage actor in the 1890s. He spent 35 years working in films, playing the parts generally available to him—waiters, porters, butlers, and convicts. From 1939 to 1942, he had a continuing role in MGM's Dr. Kildare series, as the attendant pushing Dr. Gillespie's wheelchair.

Reed retired from films in 1947, just as a young actor named Sidney Poitier entered movies, eventually opening doors for other black actors.

Huckleberry Finn's Jim was probably the most important role of Reed's career, and that says something about director Taylor's decision to cast him, especially in an age when many black roles in film were performed by white men in blackface. Walter Long in the role of Gus, the black soldier who pursues Mae Marsh in *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), is perhaps the most notorious example. There are countless others.


The Sacramento River at Rio Vista stands in for the Mississippi.

After *Huckleberry Finn* was released on February 29, 1920, speculation abounded that Mark Twain's hometown of Hannibal, Missouri, was used as a location. Paramount did not deny it, as it enhanced publicity. In reality, however, Taylor stayed closer to home, letting the Sacramento River stand in for the Mississippi, just as he had done in *Tom Sawyer* and *Huck and Tom*.

The *Huckleberry Finn* cast and crew of 37 people arrived in Rio Vista, northeast of San Francisco, on June 2, 1919, for the river scenes. The local newspaper, *Rio Vista Banner*, didn't make a fuss over the film company's presence in town beyond a first-page article ten days into the shoot. This low-key coverage was a reflection of Taylor's work ethic. He was intent on making his film as quickly and efficiently as possible, not generating publicity for himself.

After 12 days in Rio Vista, the company moved 35 miles south to Pleasanton for more location work. Most of the filming in Pleasanton occurred at the same location used in the Tom Sawyer films. They were in Pleasanton for about a week before returning to Los Angeles to complete the movie.

Taylor finished work on *Huckleberry Finn* and left Los Angeles on July 12 for New York to begin preparations for his first film with Mary Miles Minter, *Anne of Green Gables* (1919). Despite delays in production, the Minter film was released before *Huckleberry Finn*. It marked a new phase in Taylor's career, one that linked Minter and Taylor together forever in the scandal that ruined them both.

In a *Los Angeles Examiner* interview days after Taylor's murder, Mary Pickford called him, "the most patient man I ever knew." Douglas Fairbanks added: "We all knew him as a gentleman of whom the film industry might well be proud." Perhaps as Taylor's films once again become available, his true gifts will come to light.

–David Kiehn

David Kiehn is the author of Broncho Billy and the Essanay Film Company, *published in 2003, and historian for the Niles Essanay Silent Film Museum at the Edison Theater, a 1913 nickelodeon movie house in Fremont, California.*



I WAS BORN, BUT...

Live Piano Accompaniment by Stephen Horne

CAST: Tatsuo Saito (Yoshii), Mitsuko Yoshikawa (His wife), Hideo Sugawara (Their older son), Tomio Aoki, as Tokkan Kozo (Their younger son), Takeshi Sakamoto (Iwasaki), Teruyo Hayami (Mrs. Iwasaki), Seiichi Kato (Taro), Seiji Nishimura (Sensei), Shoichi Kofujita (Delivery boy), Chishu Ryu (Mover/projectionist) Playmates: Zentaro Iijima, Shotaro Fujimatsu, Masao Hayama, Teruaki Ishiwatari, Michio Sato, Kuniyasu Hayashi, Akio Nomura PRODUCTION: Shochiku Kamata 1932 DIRECTOR: Yasujiro Ozu STORY: Yasujiro Ozu, as James Maki SCENARIO: Akira Fushimi PHOTOGRAPHY: Hideo Mohara EDITOR: Hideo Mohara PHOTOGRAPHY ASSISTANTS: Yuhara Atsuta, Masao Irie SET DESIGN: Takejiro Tsunoda, Yoshiro Kimura SET FURNISHINGS: Shintaro Mimura, Tsunetaro Inoue LIGHTING: Toshimitsu Nakajima ORIGINAL LANGUAGE TITLE: *Otona no miru ehon—Umarete wa mita keredo* PRINT SOURCE: Janus Films

Preceded by an outtake from the orphan film **ST. LOUIS TO CHICAGO AIRMAIL** (1926)

"I started to make a film about children and ended up with a film about grownups; while I had originally planned to make a fairly bright little story, it changed while I was working on it .... The company hadn't thought it would turn out this way. They were so unsure of it that they delayed its release for two months." Published in a 1958 issue of the Japanese film magazine *Kinema Junpo*, this quote is the only record of what director Yasujiro Ozu thought about 1932's *I Was Born, But...*. The 24th of his 54 completed films, it brought Ozu immediate critical acclaim and remains Japan's most treasured silent film. Yet Ozu rarely mentioned it in interviews about his work.

Speculating about Ozu's unique, low-set camera style, critic Tadao Sato once wrote, "Ozu never explained anything." Sato could as easily have been referring to the director's method of working with his actors or even his views on the vast social and political changes that swept through Japan during

his lifetime. While we know what Ozu did, in the end, all we really know of why has to come from the films themselves.

Usually described as a comedy, *I Was Born, But...* has been compared to Hal Roach's Our Gang series. Yet it is much more, reflecting a tumultuous 1930s Japan being shorn of its traditions. The film focuses on the family of a typical white-collar worker ("salaryman"), his stay-at-home wife, and two school-age sons, who have just moved from Tokyo's crowded center to an unfinished suburban development. As the boys struggle to find a place in the pecking order among neighborhood kids, they outwit the dandified young Taro and his bullying protector with their wily antics, only to be humiliated when their father plays jester to his boss, who happens to be Taro's father. Ozu uses schoolboy politics to mock the hypocrisies of adult hierarchies.



Seiichi Kato flanked by Hideo Sugawara and Tomio Aoki

Japan fell hard after the 1929 stock market crash and the ensuing worldwide financial depression. The salaryman's economic position was particularly precarious—one-fifth of all unemployed Japanese were white-collar workers. At the same time, a surge of right-wing nationalism led by the military was upending the liberalism of the 1920s Taisho democracy, which had instituted universal male suffrage for the first time in Japanese history. Japan's 1931 invasion of Manchuria began a decade-long conflict with China that culminated in World War II. By 1932, military leaders rather than politicians ruled Japan, asserting control over the education system and mass media. Officers assigned to each school ensured that textbooks promoted anti-Western perspectives and that boys were drilled, military style, in their schoolyard exercises, a practice memorably depicted in *I Was Born, But...*. Military control over film studios was less pervasive, but government censors did monitor film production. The civilian government had already put an end to "tendency films," low-budget melodramas with blatant proletarian themes, after the immense popularity of *What Made Her Do It?*, Shigekichi Suzuki's 1930 tale of an impoverished arsonist. Over the next 15 years, tolerance for overt leftist statements in Japanese films fell sharply. Because Ozu's films avoided the doctrinaire messages of tendency films, censors generally left them alone.

After an adolescence of moviegoing and academic loafing, Ozu began working at the Shochiku studio in 1923, the year every other film company abandoned Tokyo following a devastating earthquake. Shochiku operated the only remaining major movie studio located in the nation's capital, so, for years, its filmmakers were uniquely positioned to chronicle Japanese modernity. While other studios focused on *jidai-geki* (period drama), Shochiku encouraged its directors to develop the *shomin-geki* (common people's drama) and *nansensu* (nonsense) comedy genres.

At first, Ozu specialized in comedy. He drew on his love of American slapstick and its master craftsmen Harold Lloyd and Charlie Chaplin to make films set among university students, working people, or the dispossessed. As his confidence grew, he branched into subsets of *shomin-geki*: films about salarymen or low-level gangsters and "home dramas" that anticipate the family-centered films of his later career. By the end of 1931, Ozu had directed more than 20 films. Nine of these still exist, at least in partial form, including a pair of social comedies about the difficulty of finding a job after college. *I Graduated, But...* (1929) borrowed its title from a popular catchphrase of the day and its theme appealed to the critics who favored tendency films. *I Flunked, But...* (1930) features a student lucky enough to be held back academically while his graduating friends flounder.

He filmed without a continuity sheet, keeping all his camera angles and compositions in his head.

In these early films, Ozu perfected many of his filmmaking practices. He wrote his own scripts in collaboration with others, taking the anglicized pseudonym James Maki to appeal to urban audiences who appreciated Shochiku films for their Western influences. He filmed without a continuity sheet, keeping all his camera angles and compositions in his head. Once he cast his actors, he never discussed with them how their characters should feel. Instead, emulating his directorial heroes Ernst Lubitsch and Chaplin, he demonstrated the desired performance, often down to the smallest gestures.

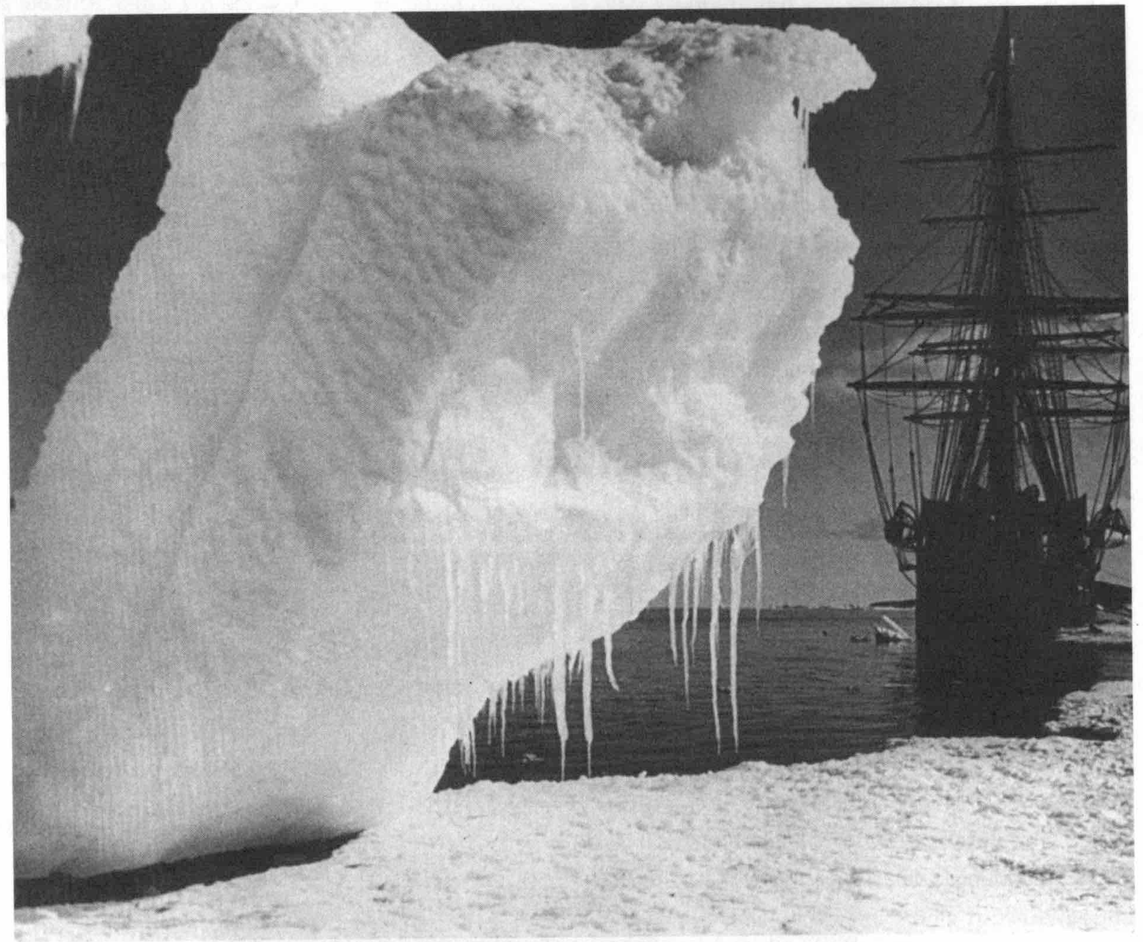
Most of his cast and crew were veterans of his sets. Tatsuo Saito, as the father Yoshii, Mitsuko Yoshikawa, as his wife, and Takeshi Sakamoto, as the father's boss and neighbor, had all appeared in multiple Ozu films. Eight-year-old Tomio Aoki was making his sixth appearance in an Ozu film. He had created a sensation as an unruly captive in *A Straightforward Boy* (1929), which was inspired by the O. Henry story "The Ransom of Red Chief." The young actor took the film's Japanese title, *Tokkan Kozo* (literally, "a kid who blunders into things"), as his screen name.

Ozu shot *I Was Born, But...* from November 1931 to April 1932. Midway through, filming was interrupted when one of the child actors was injured and, during the interval, Ozu directed another film. It is also believed that he used the hiatus to make changes to the shooting script for *I Was Born, But...*. The original ending for the film included a gag built around a troop of marching soldiers encountered by the older son when he runs away from home. For the rewritten ending, the boy stages a short-lived hunger strike whose resolution leaves the film on a more ambiguous note. According to one contemporary reviewer, some audience members left the movie theater thinking the film cheerful, others melancholy.

Production chief Shiro Kido delayed the release of *I Was Born, But...* because of Ozu's shift from gags to social commentary. But Ozu's subtle films about Japan's everyman were increasingly appreciated among critics. *I Was Born, But...* was the first of his films to be ranked at the top of *Kinema Junpo*'s annual poll, a feat swiftly repeated by *Passing Fancy* (1933) and *A Story of Floating Weeds* (1934). For the rest of his career, Ozu's films were regularly included on domestic "best of" lists. Western audiences finally got to see Ozu's early work at international retrospectives put together by Tokyo-based film historian Donald Richie just before the director's death in 1963. Ever since, *I Was Born, But...* has been the most commonly seen and beloved of his 34 silent films.

–Brian Darr

Brian Darr has written about film for Senses of Cinema, GreenCine, Keyframe, among other online outlets. Hell On Frisco Bay is his own site covering the San Francisco Bay Area movie scene.



THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

Live Accompaniment by the Matti Bye Ensemble

APPEARING: Lieutenant Henry Robertson Bowers, Thomas Clissold, Petty Officer Edgar Evans, Lawrence Oates, Herbert G. Ponting, Captain Robert Falcon Scott, Dr. Edward Adrian Wilson, and the other members of the 1910–1914 British Antarctic Expedition
PRODUCTION, DIRECTION, PHOTOGRAPHY, EDITING: Herbert G. Ponting 1924 PRINT SOURCE: British Film Institute

When rescuers found the frozen bodies of three members of the 1910–1914 British Antarctic Expedition camped eleven miles from the nearest food depot, it had been almost a year since the explorers had died. Outside the tent, all that remained of the sledge they had man-hauled for the 850-mile journey to the magnetic South Pole was a single bamboo mast. Inside, Lieutenant Henry Bowers and Chief Scientific Officer Edward Wilson were covered head to toe by their sleeping bags, "as if asleep." The leader of the expedition, Captain Robert Falcon Scott, had his coat slightly open, his arm stretched out across Wilson, his closest companion on the expedition. Among the belongings recovered were Scott's three diaries, which he maintained until the end, and some undeveloped photographs.

The last uncharted continent on earth, Antarctica's landmass had been penetrated only a few times. Scott himself had come within 460 miles of the South Pole during his first expedition launched in 1901. His second and final attempt, begun in 1910, had been one of three South Pole expeditions undertaken that year. Choku Shirase, an admiral in the Japanese navy, turned back because of harsh weather. Norwegian Roald Amundsen, who originally set out to conquer the North Pole, changed course mid-sea on hearing that the

American flag had been planted there April 6, 1909. He cabled Scott, already southbound: "Beg leave to inform you preceding Antarctica." Amundsen eventually beat Scott to the Pole by 34 days.

Out of the 100 applicants to be his expedition's photographic officer, Scott chose Herbert G. Ponting, who fit the bill as a professional and seasoned traveler. Born in 1870 to a wealthy banker in Salisbury, England, Ponting left home at 22 and headed for the American West. After a failed fruit orchard enterprise and bad investments in gold-mining, he abandoned his San Francisco wife and their two children to pursue a life of adventure as what he called a "camera artist."

According to scholar Dennis Lynch, Ponting "took up photography seriously in 1900," quickly gaining recognition for his work. He won Bausch and Lomb's World Prize, and his "Mules at a California Roundup" went on display as part of the Kodak exhibition at the St. Louis World's Fair. When a stereopticon company hired him to provide pictures for its viewing machines, he traveled the world taking images of places heard-of but unseen by many in the West: Burma, China, India, Japan, Java, Korea, Manchuria, Russia. In 1904, he was accredited by the First Japanese Army to photograph the Russo-Japanese War for *Harper's Weekly*, and, in 1905, he was admitted into the Royal Geographical Society. His images of landscapes and domestic life, often accompanied by his own travelogue commentary, were published in commercial magazines, then proliferating thanks to efficient new printing presses. The day he left London for Antarctica, copies of his first major book, *In Lotus-land Japan*, arrived at his door.

"CAMERA LUBRICANTS FROZE AND FILM HAD TO BE WOUND VERY SLOWLY TO PREVENT STATIC ELECTRIC SPARKS."

Ponting was a fastidious photographer. Even as roll film had been in use since its invention in 1889, he, like other professionals, preferred the cumbersome glass plates, which produced higher quality images. The expedition crew often complained about how long it took Ponting to photograph, and some were hurt in falls suffered while posing. The expedition's geologist Griffith Taylor invented the verb "to pont," meaning "to pose until nearly frozen in all sorts of uncomfortable positions." (The penguins Ponting disturbs in their nesting grounds might have come up with another definition.) Ponting's own memoir is filled with regret over missed opportunities, lamenting his failure to capture the detail and scale of an enormous tabular iceberg, the Arch Berg that collapsed too soon, the colorful play of light in the Grotto, the aurora australis. Scott recalled in his diaries that Ponting's frustrations often echoed throughout the hut: "The noise of breaking glass in his darkroom was not uncommon, and usually heralded his reappearance, laden with cameras, once more, to go and take his subject over again."

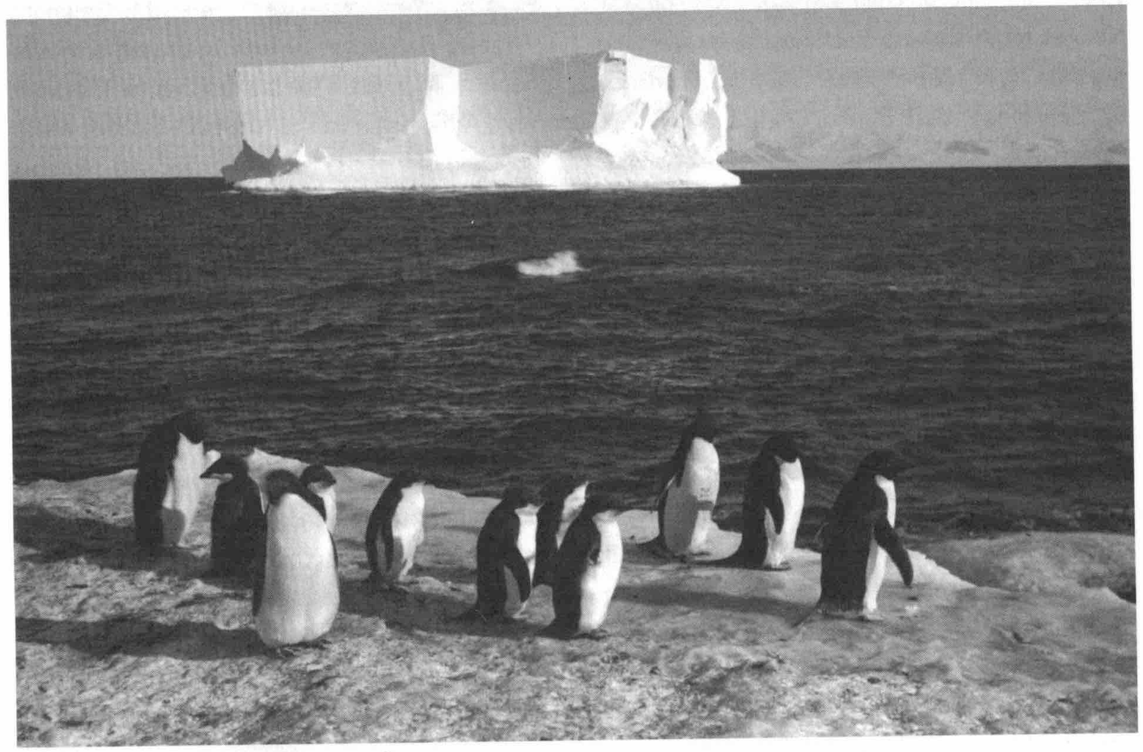
To help fund the expedition, the rights to Ponting's film footage were pre-sold to Gaumont. Ponting had never before operated a movie camera. To prepare for the task, he took lessons from Arthur Newman of Newman-Sinclair, which supplied one of the two motion picture cameras that became part of Ponting's 200-pound photography kit. In addition to the basic issue of survival in Antarctica's harsh climate, Ponting confronted challenges particular to polar photography. Dennis Lynch describes the hardships: "Camera lubricants froze; film had to be wound very slowly to prevent static electric sparks; and with a 100° difference of temperature between inside and outside the hut, condensation (and the subsequent freezing of the water produced on the inside of the camera) was a serious problem. The equipment had to be stored outside the hut. The frozen film had to be thawed very slowly before use to prevent condensation; the elaborate process took two days."

All told, he came away with more than 1,000 glass-plate photographs and shot 25,000 feet of nitrate film, which he had processed on the spot. (It took him two and a half hours to develop 50 feet of film.) He trained others to take still photographs for small scientific excursions and the long trek to the Pole, of which no motion pictures were shot. He staged the scenes of the select Pole expedition crew man-hauling their sledge, setting up their tent, cooking their meals. Ponting recalled Scott saying, "What fun it will be when we are home again and see this at the cinema!" In early 1912, Ponting left to avoid another polar winter, urging the remaining men to "[k]eep the photographic end up."

Ponting's first motion pictures screened in London in October 1911 as *With Captain Scott, R.N. to the South Pole* and, later in August 1912, as *With Captain Scott in the Antarctic*. After news of Scott's death reached England in February 1913, Gaumont re-released the footage as *The Undying Story of Captain Scott*. Ponting was dissatisfied with the film and purchased back the rights for five thousand pounds. He had shot the footage in *The Great White Silence* at a time when the "cinema of attractions" was being eclipsed by the story film. By the time *The Great White Silence* was released in 1924, the fiction feature dominated at the box office and Robert Flaherty's *Nanook of the North* (1922) had raised the bar for documentary storytelling. To expand his film into a proper feature, Ponting incorporated illustrations, models, and rudimentary stop-motion sequences as well as inserted the stills taken by the doomed men.

The expedition and its legacy came to define Ponting. He spent the rest of his professional life touring with his films and lantern slides, recounting the tale. He re-edited his film footage into a sound version, adapting his lectures for the narration, and released it in 1933 it as *90° South*. He later considered the time spent lecturing and promoting the films a waste, even calling his decision to join the expedition "the great error of my life." The camera artist Ponting might have preferred new subjects. Yet his images not only set new artistic standards for nature photography but also stoked the legend of Scott and his men, whose failure looms larger in our imaginations than Amundsen's success.

–Shari Kizirian





IL FUOCO

Live Piano Accompaniment by Stephen Horne

CAST: Pina Menichelli (Poetess/"She"), Febo Mari (Mario Alberti, the painter) PRODUCTION: Itala Film 1915 DIRECTOR: Giovanni Pastrone, as Piero Fosco STORY: Febo Mari SCENARIO: Febo Mari, Giovanni Pastrone PHOTOGRAPHY: Segundo de Chomón PRINT SOURCE: Torino Museo Nazionale del Cinema

Preceded by the orphan film **Origin of Beethoven's "Moonlight Sonata"** (1909)

"Our Lady of the Spasms," was the label critic Nino Frank famously gave to Pina Menichelli for her writhing poses and sudden movements. Her performances, at once dated and strikingly modern, are preserved in the amber tinting and toning characteristic of the so-called "second period" of silent cinema. Falling between Méliès's "trick" films and the narrative model familiar to viewers today, the films of this second period, as historian Nicola Mazzanti observes in the journal *Film History*, "seem to constantly hint at other solutions, other alternatives to that cinema we now consider classical."

Il fuoco (*The Fire*) is such a film, a mix of motifs both familiar and forgotten. On the familiar side, it features Menichelli in one of the earliest appearances of the iconic femme fatale and belongs to the celebrated diva genre, an Italian precursor to Hollywood's star system. Less familiar to contemporary viewers are its choices of spectacle over continuity and stylized gestures over naturalistic acting. Its dazzling rainbow of tints and tones reminds us that we are no longer in the black-and-white Kansas of classic Hollywood cinema, and the film packs an extraordinary amount of melodramatic action into its not-quite feature length.

Pina Menichelli plays a rich and powerful poet—the credits identify her character simply as "She"—who seduces then abandons a naïve painter played by Febo Mari, who also cowrote the script. Menichelli's sexually aggressive poet seems more at home in the liberated world of *Sex and the City* than the patriarchal, ultra-Catholic Italy of 1915, where women couldn't vote or get a divorce. Her motivation, as she toys with the painter, remains as obscure as her screen presence is mesmerizing. Critics have taken pains to distinguish the Italian diva from her sister, the vamp. "The vamp is more calculating in her devastation, the woman who lives off the unhappiness of her victims," wrote Nino Frank in 1954. "The Italian femme fatale is guided toward a destiny often as redoubtable for her as for others." A distinction that means little to the poor painter dazzled by Menichelli's poet.

Menichelli's sexually aggressive poet seems more at home in SEX IN THE CITY than in ultra-Catholic Italy.

The Sicilian-born daughter of a theatrical family, Menichelli had been working in film since 1912 but didn't ascend into the company of sister divas Francesca Bertini and Lyda Borelli until *Il fuoco* appeared. A phenomenon unique to Italy in the second decade of the 20th century, "diva" described not only these influential and well-paid actresses but also a genre of films, in which they generally played tormented women who, in the words of historian Gian Piero Brunetta, "[are] at once priestesses and conscious victims of all the rites of Eros."

Although largely forgotten today, the divas were as powerful offscreen as their on-screen characters were powerless. (Menichelli's poet is the rare exception to this rule). Lyda Borelli, whose 1913 *Ma l'amor mio non muore* (*Everlasting Love*) is often cited as the first diva film, inspired adulation. Her hordes of admirers copied her dress, her hair, her very gestures. A new word—*borellismo*—was coined to describe their fandom. In 1919, Francesca Bertini signed a contract to make eight films for 2,000,000 lira, a record sum for the day. Film historian Vernon Jarrat describes how Menichelli negotiated her own fees: "If [the producer] began to show any signs of rebellion Menichelli would promptly and ostentatiously begin to pack her numerous trunks preparatory to seeking her fortune abroad."

Yet if their salaries and outsize personalities link them to modern stars, their stylized acting harkens back to their 19th century opera namesakes. "She enters into the picture as if to perform a solo," wrote film historian Pierre Leprohon, "which everything else, down to the smallest detail, must help to emphasize." Like those of her operatic predecessors, the diva's performance bore little relation to the naturalistic acting that later dominated cinema. Even during its heyday, the diva style was mocked. In 1918, novelist Colette skewered common diva clichés in the magazine article, "A Short Manual for the Aspiring Scenario Writer": "Q: What happens to the femme fatale at the end of the sensational film? A: She dies. Preferably on three steps, covered by a rug. Q: And between the apotheosis and the fall of the femme fatale, isn't there room on the screen for numerous passionate gestures? A: Numerous, to say the least. The two principal ones involve the hat and the rising gorge …. When the spectator sees the evil woman coiffing herself with a spread-winged owl … he knows just what she is capable of."

In fact, Pina Menichelli's poet in *Il fuoco* signals her predatory nature with an owl hat and a love nest referred to as "Owl Castle" in the intertitles. Director Pastrone, who had established his credentials as a master of spectacle with 1914's *Cabiria*, gives the poet and painter a lavish set in which to love and suffer. Part of the pleasure of *Il fuoco*, then and now, is the luxurious ambiance of the poet's castle, with its staff of discreet servants and Menichelli's elaborate gowns and jewels (who designed that astonishing hat?), all captured in richly tinted photography.



The film's complex color scheme was characteristic of Italian film of the late teens and the result of two separate post-production coloring processes. Toning affects the shadows of the film frame, while tinting colors the highlights. As dramatic emphasis rather than naturalism was usually the goal, the results may seem odd to modern filmgoers. In the world of *Il fuoco*, a garden can be blue, green, or pink, or possibly all three in succession. Segundo de Chomón, who photographed *Il fuoco*, got his start coloring films for Pathé and experimented with color effects his entire career. The festival is screening the 1991 restoration print, which followed the film's original production notes on color and used toning and tinting techniques of the time.

An expensive process, toning diminished dramatically in the early 1920s (tinting survived a little longer), which also coincided with the end of the diva era. Like paleontologists who dispute why dinosaurs disappeared, film historians disagree about what exactly snuffed out the women writhing, fainting, and even dying on Italian screens. The various explanations offered—that focus on the diva stunted the development of other aspects of filmmaking or that the divas were too expensive—imply that the divas were crushed by the weight of their own excess. Indeed, film historians writing during the ascendancy of neorealism even blame the divas for the collapse of the Italian film industry at the end of World War I, as if these femme fatales had the power to lead not only men but whole industries to their doom.

Menichelli, like Borelli and Bertini, used her diva stardom as a stepping stone to marriage into the Italian aristocracy. In 1924, she married Baron Carlo D'Amato of Rinascimento Film, the studio where she had worked since 1919, and immediately retired. Although she later destroyed all documents and photos related to her film career, she could not erase herself from history. In the 1950s, surrealist painter Salvador Dali recalled a classic moment from Menichelli's second diva film *Tigre reale* (*Royal Tiger*, 1916), in which she chews a flower from a bouquet: "In those days, characterized by such violent eroticism, palms and magnolias were bitten off and devoured by these women whose frail and sickly look did not rule out corporeal shapes thriving on a feverish and precocious youth."

–Monica Nolan

Monica Nolan is a novelist who has written about film and culture for the San Francisco Chronicle, Release Print, Bitch *magazine, Frameline, and the San Francisco Film Society.*

SILENT DIVAS *of the* ITALIAN CINEMA

by Guy Maddin



When on a shopping spree for anguish, rapture, martyrdom, comas, counts, rapes, bastards, orphans, dogaressas, philtres, sirens, suicides, mistaken identities, flower festivals, and sudden fatal loves—even a tattooed baby—one need look no further than the Italian Diva Film, a vast clearinghouse of art nouveau decors and 19th century melodramatic devices still in wondrous working order.

Within these pages* are the gaudy inventories of these diva films, which flourished on the continent between 1910 and 1920, and which starred cinema's first divinities: Lyda Borelli, Pina Menichelli, Francesca Bertini, and other Olympian ancestors of the merely mortal stars of Hollywood history. Gathering into one deeply conscious glance all the beauty scattered so sublimely through that last hour of the fin de siècle, the Italian film diva is both the movie's center and the movie itself; she is the eye and the hurricane. Indolently we bathe in her fragrant mysticisms and sensualities, while all about her, rent hearts and havoc are strewn with the violence of Armageddon. Even she is consumed by the force of her own storm—babies are ripped from her arms, leering roadmen are thrust into their place. She is buffeted by betrayals. Her purses are torn away. Her hands are pelted by ducal kisses innumerable.

Savagely lashed by her own tresses while Destiny blasts her soul, the diva cries out for vengeance, cries out with her entire body, and this is what is most spectacular about the diva film—the vocabulary of the body! Aided only in part by as many as 30 drool-inducing costume changes per film, the diva's body twists and ripples in endless metamorphoses expressing wave upon wave of inner tumult. Ever so slowly—for the film's time is the diva's time!—and in a fashion completely alien to our New World eyes, do the torso and its limbs strain toward an unprecedented posture of prurience enmarbled and, upon achieving this shocking pose, move on to the next astonishing attitude, unfurling fingers first, languidly allowing these digits to splay about the face and the bosom of the diva and in so doing inscribe upon those marvelous surfaces the plots of all stories from all time.

Penny-dreadfully named—*Satanic Rhapsody*, *Royal Tiger*, *The Painting of Osvaldo Mars*—and aggressively assembled by genuine but forgotten Italian auteurs, the diva films are hugely watchable. Packed with melodramatic non sequiturs, dazzling and long-abandoned editing tropes, and sometimes outright peculiar toning and tinting strategies, these compact little dramas—most of them run under an hour—induce the most arcane intoxication.

The films' morbid and degenerate yoking of sex and death, and their closety devotion to costumery and decors, spritz the bruised-fruit aromas of Decadence from one end of the program to the other. One can feel in all the scenarios the pervasive influence of Gabriele D'Annunzio—a kind of Italian Walt Disney of his day, his long-gloved fingers in a bit of everything. It seems plausible that D'Annunzio, the great sensualist author and poet, ghostwrote the screenplays and, with his one tin eye shining, oversaw the production of these movies like the construction of so many death-rides at a great Liebestod theme park.

While the cult of the diva grew within the Italian populace, Mussolini could perceive the fevers of degeneracy in this great film genre. Preferring more subservient women for his country's ideal, he especially disapproved of an art form that celebrated the fearsome power and savage suffering of the feminine. After his rise to power, the diva film went into eclipse.

Now, exalted by the imminent return of the diva, I'm determined to throng her portico with the other ardent suitors. Then, at first sight of her and her heartsick entourage, I shall toss my unworthy self headlong at the hem of her dress, hoping to plant there just one kiss before being swept into oblivion by the delicious fury of the Divine.



Lyda Borelli in *Satanic Rhapsody* 1917

Guy Maddin is a filmmaker and cinephiliac from Winnipeg, Manitoba, whose latest feature Keyhole *comes out this fall.*

**The original version of the essay first appeared as the foreword to Angela Dalle Vacche's* Diva: Defiance and Passion in Early Italian Cinema *and is reprinted with the permission of the author.*



Courtesy of Le Giornate del Cinema Muto

WALT DISNEY'S LAUGH-O-GRAMS

Live Piano Accompaniment by Donald Sosin

Before Mickey Mouse, before the Fairbanksian moustache, and even before the Alice comedies, came Walt Disney's Laugh-O-grams. Disney's first animated films began in 1920 as after-work projects when Disney was a commercial artist for an advertising company in Kansas City. He made these cartoons by himself and with the help of a few friends.

He started by persuading Frank Newman, Kansas City's leading exhibitor, to include short snippets of animation in the series of weekly newsreels Newman produced for his chain of three theaters. Tactfully called "Newman Laugh-O-grams," Disney's footage was meant to mix advertising with topical humor. Of these fillers, only the pilot survives, a two-and-a-half minute sample reel that reveals the format: the hand of a lightning sketch artist composes gently satirical drawings that come to life in a final animated sequence. The last scene of the pilot, which editorializes on local police corruption headlines, was animated by Disney alone. It is one of the few surviving scenes he ever completed by himself.

The Laugh-O-grams were a hit, leading to commissions for animated intermission fillers and coming attractions slides for Newman's theaters. Spurred by his success, the 19-year-old Disney decided to try something more ambitious: animated fairy tales. Influenced by New York animator Paul Terry's spoofs of *Aesop's Fables*, which had premiered in June 1920, Disney decided not only to parody fairy-tale classics but also to modernize them by having them playing off recent events. With the help of high school student Rudy Ising, who later cofounded the Warner Brothers and MGM cartoon studios, and other local would-be cartoonists, Disney worked for six months putting together his first fairy tale cartoon.

Little Red Riding Hood is a Jazz Age pastiche featuring a wolfish city slicker who drives a magic car, a grandma off to see the movies, and a hero who rescues his sweetheart from a wing-flapping airplane. It is very much a beginner's effort—simple sketches of characters posed in front of minimal backgrounds, the animation derived from the slash-and-tear technique Disney was learning from Edwin Lutz's classic animation textbook, the Paul

LAUGH-O-GRAMS ARE SILENT MOVIES BORN TO SWING.

Terry Aesop's Fables, and John Bray's Krazy Kat cartoons he and his friends cadged from a local film exchange. Working at first out of his garage, Disney improvised even with his equipment. His Universal camera was mounted on a stand made by stretching a plank across four-by-fours.

Disney made six more Laugh-O-grams in Kansas City, which all survive, thanks to the remarkable detective work of animation collectors and historians working in collaboration with the Walt Disney Archives, the Museum of Modern Art, and the Library of Congress. Simple and naïve, they also indicate a remarkable progression.

Most apparent are the rapid advances Disney and his growing gang of collaborators were making from one cartoon to another in little over a year. In *The Four Musicians of Bremen*, made directly after *Little Red Riding Hood*, Disney, no longer content to sketch in a simple, unadorned story line, started creating ingenious gags—like luring jazz-crazy fish out of the water with jiving musical notes—and tried to build on them, creating smooth transitions from one to another. He also experimented with milking gags—how many ways can you dodge a cannon ball?—and improving his comic timing. *Jack and the Beanstalk* is still unavailable to the public, but *Goldie Locks and the Three Bears* shows Disney paying attention to comic atmospherics, setting the mood with a pastoral sunrise. He then introduces what is likely the first of his many diabolical Rube Goldberg contraptions, in this case a cuckoo clock and a stove tricked out to streamline the production of pancakes.

It's impossible to watch these cartoons and not see the shape of things to come. The storm at sea in *Jack the Giant Killer* is a raw prefiguration of those elegant sea storms in Silly Symphonies like *Father Noah's Ark* and *Music Land*, culminating in *Little Toot*. The comic, fearsome animals with all their sharp teeth and gleaming eyes that glance our way before pouncing on our heroes get started here too. Above all, Disney's gift for music and rhythm is apparent from the first toot of Mom's mail horn in *Little Red Riding Hood*. The Laugh-O-grams are silent movies born to swing. From the start, Disney conceives his cartoons as a form of visual novelty jazz, filled with mock concerts and dance routines. Many of them amount to silent musicals, a foretaste of the syncopated Mickey and the jazz-mad Silly Symphonies. They also offer the earliest versions of the Magic Kingdom, where kings live in palaces amid Midwestern small towns and little girls are given royal parades down Main Street.

Also noticeable, however, is the strain of ongoing financial pressures. Disney's Kansas City studio was in financial trouble from the start, and, thanks to predatory business deals and his own inexperience, he suffered bankruptcy before practically any of his cartoons were released. He thought he had found a distributor for his Laugh-O-gram fairy tales in a fly-by-night company called the Pictorial Clubs of Tennessee, which promised $11,100 for six cartoons but never paid. Overworked and desperate, by the end of 1922, Disney's crew was working without pay and several quit. So while the actual drawing and design of the Laugh-O-grams steadily improve as the crew gains

experience, the animation itself tends to regress, growing simpler and more crudely timed.

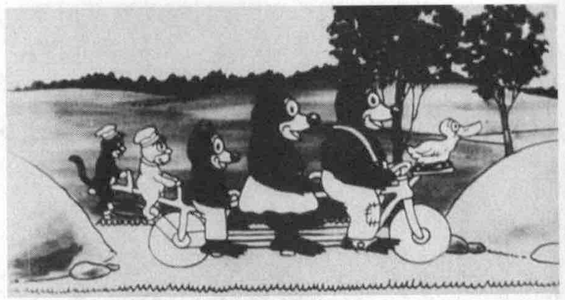
Salvation came in the form of four-year-old Virginia Davis and Disney's latest brainstorm of placing a live girl among cartoon figures. True, he simply inverted the Fleischer formula of putting a cartoon character in a live-action scene. But the idea revitalized Disney, inspiring his most imaginative and versatile creation yet. Brimming with self-confidence, he persuaded most of his crew, including Iwerks, Harman, Ising, and even Virginia's parents, to leave Kansas City for California where they could start over again. The adventure continued.

Disney sued Pictorial Clubs for breach of contract, eventually winning the suit but receiving very little recompense. His loss, however, is our gain. It was long thought that none of the pre-Alice Kansas City films were ever released. Like countless other silent shorts, Disney's fledgling efforts were consigned to oblivion after the coming of sound. Pictorial Clubs, however, found ways of profiting from these films and, after the success of Mickey Mouse in 1928, the Laugh-O-grams were fitted with soundtracks and circulated internationally under different titles. The tangled story of how they were finally identified and rescued is best summarized in David Gerstein's Ramapith blog.

Four of the prints at the festival come from versions circulated by a British company, Wardour Film Ltd., which, in 1929 and 1930, released them as the Peter the Puss series, designed a title logo to make Peter look like Felix the Cat, and then gave them non-fairy-tale titles. The title credits give some idea of the tough law-of-the-jungle independent trade that Disney and other young animators encountered in the 1920s; the movies themselves show the kind of resilience that enabled him to endure

–Russell Merritt and J.B. Kaufman

Russell Merritt and J.B. Kaufman are the coauthors of Walt in Wonderland: The Silent Films of Walt Disney *(2000) and* Walt Disney's Silly Symphonies: A Companion to the Classic Cartoon Series *(2006).*



NEWMAN LAUGH-O-GRAMS Sample reel directed and animated by Walt Disney in his garage at 3028 Bellefontaine Avenue. Kansas City premiere at Newman Theater March 20, 1921. Print courtesy of Walt Disney Archives

LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD Directed by Walt Disney, with animation by Disney, Rudolph Ising, and others unknown. Produced in Disney's garage circa October 1921–May 1922; original release unknown. Reissued by U.K.'s Wardour Film Ltd. as *Grandma Steps Out.* Print courtesy of Museum of Modern Art (MoMA)

THE FOUR MUSICIANS OF BREMEN Directed by Walt Disney and animated by Disney, Rudolph Ising, and others unknown. Produced in the Disney garage circa April–May 1922. Distributed nontheatrically by Pictorial Clubs Inc. of New York on a regional circuit. Reissued by U.K.'s Wardour Film Ltd. as *The Four Jazz Boys* in 1930. Print Courtesy of Walt Disney Archives

GOLDIE LOCKS AND THE THREE BEARS Produced at 31st Street September–October 1922. Directed by Walt Disney and animated by Disney, Hugh Harman, Rudolph Ising, Carman "Max" Maxwell, Lorey Tague, and Otto Walliman, with photography by Red Lyon. Distributed nontheatrically on a regional circuit by Pictorial Clubs Inc. of New York. Reissued by U.K.'s Wardour Film Ltd. as *The Peroxide Kid* 1930. Print courtesy of MoMA

PUSS IN BOOTS Produced at 31st Street circa September–October 1922. Directed by Walt Disney and animated by Disney, Hugh Harman, Rudolph Ising, Carman "Max" Maxwell, Lorey Tague, and Otto Walliman, with photography by Red Lyon. Reissued by U.K.'s Wardour Film Ltd. as *The Cat's Whiskers* 1930. Print courtesy of MoMA

JACK THE GIANT KILLER 1922, directed by Walt Disney and animated by Disney, Ub Iwerks, Hugh Harman, Rudolph Ising, Carman "Max" Maxwell, Lorey Tague, and Otto Walliman, with camera by Red Lyon. Reissued by U.K.'s Wardour Film Ltd. as *The K-O Kid.* Print courtesy of MoMA

ALICE'S WONDERLAND Produced at the Laugh-O-gram studio at 3239 Troost Avenue in Spring 1923 and delivered circa October 14, 1923. Starring Virginia Davis as Alice and Walt Disney as the animator, with Ub Iwerks, Hugh Harman, and Rudolph Ising as the other animators. Production, direction, and animation by Walt Disney, with camera by Ub Iwerks and Rudolph Ising, and technical direction by Hugh Harman and Carman "Max" Maxwell. Distributed nontheatrically on regional circuit by Pictorial Clubs Inc. of New York. Print courtesy of Walt Disney Archives



THE BLIZZARD

Live Accompaniment by the Matti Bye Ensemble

CAST: Einar Hanson (Gunnar Hede), Pauline Brunius (Gunnar's mother), Mary Johnson (Ingrid), Adolf Olschansky (Mr. Blomgren), Stina Berg (Mrs. Blomgren), Hugo Björne (Gunnar's father), Thecla Åhlander (Miss Stava), Gösta Hillberg (Lawyer) PRODUCTION: AB Svensk Filminspelning 1923 PRODUCER: Charles Magnusson DIRECTOR: Mauritz Stiller SCENARIO: Mauritz Stiller, Alma Söderhjelm, adapted from the novel *En herrgårdssägen* (*From a Swedish Homestead*) by Selma Lagerlöf PHOTOGRAPHY: Julius Jaenzon, as J. Julius ART DIRECTOR: Axel Esbensen ORIGINAL LANGUAGE TITLE: *Gunnar Hedes saga* PRINT SOURCE: Swedish Film Institute
Preceded by an orphan film fragment from the lost Wallace Reid picture **The Tribal Law** (1912)

Without the writings of Selma Lagerlöf, Sweden might not have experienced its first Golden Age of cinema, which lasted from 1917 to 1924. The first woman and first Swedish writer to win the Nobel Prize for Literature (1909), Lagerlöf wrote novels suffused with a respect for nature and deeply rooted in the myths and folklore of her native country. In 1917, she granted exclusive rights to her work to Svenska Biografteatern (later Svensk Filmindustri), which turned her stories into films directed by Mauritz Stiller, Victor Sjöström, and others that became enduring classics of the burgeoning international art form.

The two master directors were close friends. Although their styles, interests, and temperaments were very different, they often seemed to be on parallel paths. Their greatest films were based on Lagerlöf's books and stories. Sjöström made five films from her works, and Stiller three. Both later directed in America but had difficulty adjusting to the Hollywood studio system; and both returned to Sweden after only a few years. And, while Sjöström's career took a different direction into theater as an actor and director, Stiller's life

and work were cut tragically short, his brilliance unfulfilled.

Born Moshe Stiller in Helsinki in 1883 of Russian Jewish parents, Stiller began working as an actor at the age of 16. In 1904, he fled to Sweden to avoid being drafted into the Russian army. By 1912, he was working as manager and director at an avant-garde theater in Stockholm, where he was recruited by the newly-formed Svenska Bio, along with another promising actor-director, Victor Sjöström. The two directed, wrote, and acted in their own and each others' films.



Sweden's Golden Age of cinema owes a debt to author Selma Lagerlöf.

Sjöström, who came from the same rural province of Värmland in southern Sweden as Lagerlöf, was the first to adapt her work with *Tösen från Stormyrtorpet* (*The Girl from the Marsh Croft*, 1917). He also considered directing another Lagerlöf adaptation, *Herr Arnes pengar* (*Sir Arne's Treasure*, 1919), but turned it over to Stiller, who closely followed the original story, incorporating both its mystical elements and its focus on the natural world. As Hans Pensel writes in *Sjöström and Stiller in Hollywood*, "Nature becomes an active part in the life of [Lagerlöf's] characters: sunshine, snow, wind, rain, dusk, dawn, and night are described more like characters in a fairy tale than mere physical phenomena."

But Stiller the foreigner did not work exclusively with Swedish themes. He had shown a flair for comedy in his earlier films and, following *Sir Arne's Treasure*, he made *Erotikon* (1920), a sparkling and sardonic roundelay of marital infidelity. According to film historian Richard Combs, Stiller displayed "the versatility and lightness of a genre stylist." Masters of sophisticated comedy Ernst Lubitsch and Jean Renoir admitted they were inspired by *Erotikon*. So did Charles Chaplin.

In his next Lagerlöf adaptation, Stiller hewed less closely to the author's novel than he had with *Sir Arne's Treasure*. The story of a sensitive young musician whose effort to restore his family's fortune has disastrous consequences, *Gunnar Hedes saga* (*The Blizzard*) blends Lagerlöf's themes of nature and dreams with Stiller's own ideas of how to tell a story on film. In an appreciation of Stiller that Sjöström wrote for Bengt Idestam-Alquist's 1952 book, *Swedish Cinema: The Stiller and Sjöström Period*, the director noted that "Stiller was so modern that he made whatever changes in the story that he thought would be of best effect, regardless of what the author had written." According to Sjöström, Stiller saw some documentary footage about reindeer in Lapland at the studio's lab and decided to change the novel's climactic sheepherding scene to reindeer herding, using that footage. Lagerlöf was furious, but the film was a popular and critical success, and its impact has not diminished. In 1977, Richard Combs wrote, "It is one of those rare works in which every detail and gesture functions perfectly on both a literal and symbolic level, so that the scenes do not so much open out as downwards … suggesting that the film is constantly plumbing the connections and uses of dreams."

Great chunks of *The Blizzard* have been missing for years, a factor that, according the Swedish Film Institute's Jon Wengström, may have contributed to the film's unjust status as "second-tier." The most recent restoration, in 2009, uses original intertitles to bridge the missing footage, and, even at little more than half its original length, the film retains its power. British critic Alexander Jacoby wrote: "A film of exquisite dreamlike beauty, his last and most sophisticated study of artistic ambition and personal alienation, it's also his most psychologically perceptive film."

"A FILM OF EXQUISITE DREAMLIKE BEAUTY, HIS LAST AND MOST SOPHISTICATED STUDY OF ARTISTIC AMBITION AND PERSONAL ALIENATION, IT'S ALSO HIS MOST PSYCHOLOGICALLY PERCEPTIVE FILM."

Stiller's final Lagerlöf adaptation, the epic *Gösta Berlings saga* (1924) was even more freely adapted. It originally ran three or four hours (sources differ) and was shown in two parts but was later re-edited to 137 minutes. It remains Stiller's best-known film because it gave the world Greta Garbo. The rest of Stiller's own saga, according to legend, plays out in fast-forward. Both he and Garbo were signed by MGM and went to Hollywood. Garbo was a success, Stiller was not, and MGM fired him before he made a single film. He went home to Sweden and quickly died of a broken heart. The truth is less melodramatic, but no less tragic. Used to doing things his way, Stiller clashed with MGM bosses and was replaced as director on the Garbo film *The Temptress* (1926). His friend, German producer Erich Pommer, then head of production at Paramount, offered him work directing the Pola Negri vehicle, *Hotel Imperial* (1927), which was notable for its innovative camerawork and earned good reviews. Paramount seemed like a nice fit for Stiller, but his health was failing and, after a few more films, two of which he was unable to complete, he returned to Sweden in late 1927. He died of a lung ailment about a year later.

Sjöström, who had returned to Sweden for the holidays, visited Stiller in the hospital daily before his death and found him brimming with enthusiasm about future projects. A few days before Stiller died, Sjöström received a call at home from a nurse telling him that Stiller wanted him to go back to the hospital, that he had something important to tell him. When Sjöström returned, the two men talked about inconsequential things, and, finally, as Sjöström was leaving, Stiller became agitated and didn't want to let him go. "I want to tell you a story for a film, it will be a great film, and you are the only one who can do it," Stiller said, weeping. Sjöström soothed him and promised he'd be back the next day to hear the story. But by then it was too late. Stiller had become incoherent and then comatose. He died a few days later.

–Margarita Landazuri

Margarita Landazuri writes about film for the Turner Classic Movies website and other publications. She is coeditor of the Silent Film Festival program book.



THE GOOSE WOMAN

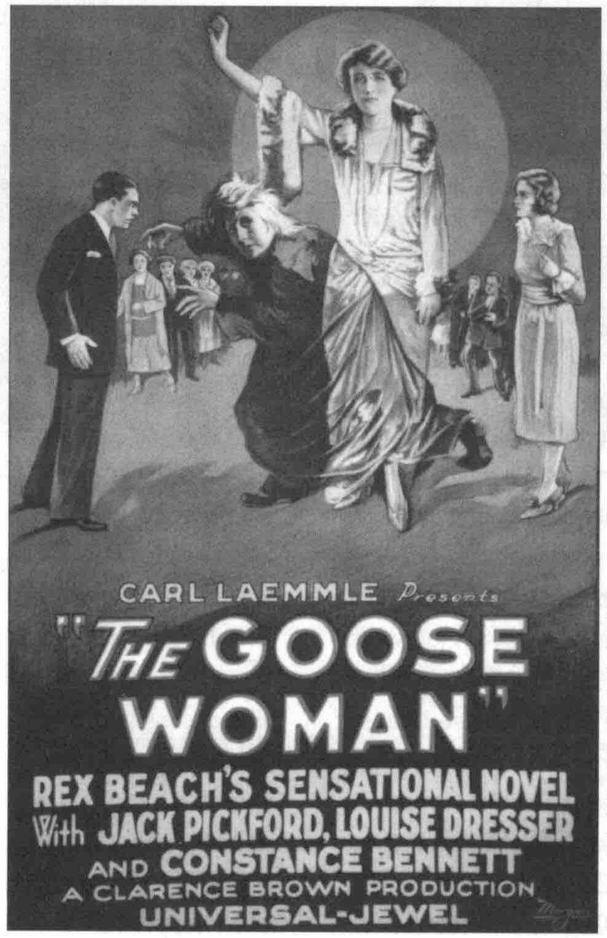
Live Piano Accompaniment by Stephen Horne

CAST: Louise Dresser (Marie de Nardi/Mary Holmes), Jack Pickford (Gerald Holmes), Constance Bennett (Hazel Woods), Spottiswoode Aitken (Jacob Riggs), Gustav von Seyffertitz (Thomas Vogel), George Nichols (Detective Lopez), Marc McDermott (Amos Ethridge), George Cooper (Reporter) PRODUCTION: Universal Pictures Corporation 1925 PRODUCER: Carl Laemmle DIRECTOR: Clarence Brown SCENARIO: Melville Brown, based on a short story by Rex Beach TITLES: Dwinelle Benthall PHOTOGRAPHY: Milton Moore EDITOR: Ray Curtiss PRINT SOURCE: UCLA Film and Television Archive.

It could have been a lurid, "ripped from the headlines" melodrama from a studio known for its cheap genre films. Instead, *The Goose Woman* (1925) became one of Universal's "Jewels," a prestige production with a better than average script, an excellent cast and production values, and an up-and-coming director.

German immigrant Carl Laemmle opened the 230-acre Universal City on the north side of the Hollywood Hills in 1915. It was one of the largest motion picture production facilities in the world, with its own municipality, post office, police, and fire department. By 1925, Universal's output of 51 feature films was exceeded only by First National's 52 and Paramount's 72. "In marketing terms, Universal was the Woolworth's of the motion picture business," according to film historian Richard Koszarski. Laemmle "produced his films cheaply and in quantity, realizing economies by keeping salaries low and employing mass-production techniques." But the studio also invested considerable money and effort into its Jewel productions such as *The Goose Woman*.

While Laemmle was building Universal, director Clarence Brown was serving as an apprentice. A University of Tennessee engineering graduate, Brown had worked as an auto mechanic and salesman. He later claimed that a visit to a nickelodeon on a lunch break convinced him to become a filmmaker. At 24, he moved to Fort Lee, New Jersey, then the nation's movie capital, and approached director Maurice Tourneur with a nervy proposition: "Why don't you take a fresh brain that knows nothing about the business and bring him up your way?" To Brown's delight, he was hired at $30 a week. "Maurice Tourneur was my god," he told film historian Kevin Brownlow during an interview in the 1960s. "I owe him everything I've got in the world." After flying with the air force during World War I, Brown returned to Tourneur's sets, assisting on *The Last of the Mohicans* (1920), *The Great Redeemer* (1920), and other films known for their use of light to enhance mood and intensify drama. "Whenever we saw a painting with an interesting lighting effect, we'd copy it," Brown told Brownlow. "We had a library of pictures. 'Rembrandt couldn't be wrong,' we'd say. At least we stole from the best!"



Courtesy of Kevin Brownlow, Photoplay Productions

Brown eventually left Tourneur to accept a contract at Universal, where young promising directors often cut their teeth. Because of its voluminous output, the studio provided valuable training to other well-known directors like John Ford and William Wyler. A string of successes led Brown to a project of intense notoriety and readymade publicity. Rex Beach loosely based his short story "The Goose Woman" on the gruesome 1922 Hall-Mills double murder of a New Jersey Episcopal priest and a woman rumored to be his mistress. The suspects were his rich widow and her two brothers. All these details, however, were absent from Beach's story. Instead, he took his inspiration from supposed witness Jane Gibson, whose occupation raising hogs earned her the nickname "Pig Woman." Her accounts of what she saw and heard kept changing, and the press swarmed around her in fascination.

While the film was in production, the murders had not been solved, so Brown and scenarist Melville Brown had to be cautious not to duplicate the facts of the crime and incite libel suits. In the short story and film, opera star Marie de Nardi loses her voice after giving birth to an illegitimate son. Overwhelmed by scandal and bitterness, she changes her name to Mary Holmes, rejects her child, and retreats to a shack in the New Jersey marshland. Her life is reduced to swilling gin, raising geese, and playing old recordings of her once glorious voice. When a murder occurs nearby, she lies to the prosecutor to gain publicity and renewed fame.

In the title role, Louise Dresser brought scant film experience but had had a long career in vaudeville and on Broadway. Jack Pickford, younger brother to Mary, was cast as her son, and the beautiful square-jawed blonde Constance Bennett, who came from a prominent theatrical family, played his love interest. With his characteristic attention to detail, Brown made a radio

broadcast requesting geese as extras and, when he saw the perfect shack "off in the country somewhere," he had it relocated to Universal's back lot.

Carl Laemmle had to avoid offending Will Hays, head of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America, who had warned studios not to mock the 18th Amendment, which, in 1920, outlawed the production, sale, and transport of alcohol. *The Goose Woman* features an abundance of empty gin bottles, but barely a hint of imbibing. When Mary lifts a bottle to her lips, she turns away from the camera, throws her head back, and shudders. The only time she is shown taking a drink, her face is obscured. Desperate for a calming shot during a makeover, she swallows high-proof hair tonic, then coughs in disgust, her entire head wrapped in beauty gauze.

put it. As for the Hall-Mills trial, the real-life Pig Woman's changing testimony destroyed the prosecution's case, and the suspects were acquitted. The crime has never been solved. Like *The Goose Woman*, RKO's *The Past of Mary Holmes* (1933) was based on Beach's story rather than the actual crime.

Brown moved to MGM, where Greta Garbo and John Gilbert displayed a potent erotic chemistry in his *Flesh and the Devil* (1926). He went on to a long distinguished career that included *A Free Soul* (1931), *Anna Karenina* (1935), *National Velvet* (1944), and *The Yearling* (1947). In his seminal text on silent film, *The Parade's Gone By,* Kevin Brownlow called Brown "one of the great names of American motion pictures—one of the few whose mastery was undiminished by the arrival of sound." *The Goose Woman* had a particularly profound effect on Brownlow himself, who credits *The Goose Woman* as the first film to reveal the potential riches of American silent-era cinema to him. In a 2004 interview for the British Film Institute, he recalled seeing it for the first time: "I knew nothing about film history and was discovering it on the fly. When I opened that parcel and projected that picture, I suddenly realized the incredible range of American silent films, and I felt, 'My God, I wouldn't mind spending the rest of my life discovering them,' which is really what happened."

"Her performance is so remarkable that it has been the talk of Hollywood for the last six weeks."

Tourneur's influence and Brown's sure hand are obvious throughout, in the striking close-ups, sensitive performances, fluid camera, and evocative lighting. Much of the film's success, however, has been attributed to Dresser. "Her performance is so remarkable that it has been the talk of Hollywood for the last six weeks," reported the *New York Times* soon after the premiere. "Louise Dresser was one of the best actresses in the history of cinema," wrote film historian DeWitt Bodeen in 1982. "No one who saw her in *The Goose Woman* could forget her." When Brown moved to United Artists for *The Eagle* (1925), he enlisted the versatile Dresser to play Catherine the Great.

Dresser earned an Academy Award nomination for *A Ship Comes In* (1928), played a memorable supporting role in *The Scarlet Empress* (1934), and retired in 1937. Constance Bennett enjoyed a major career in sound, excelling at sophisticated comedies and tearjerkers. The thrice married Jack Pickford was plagued by alcoholism, bankruptcy, and syphilis. He died at 36 having "play[ed] the roulette of life," as screenwriter Frances Marion

–Matthew Kennedy

Matthew Kennedy teaches film history at San Francisco's City College and the Conservatory of Music. He is the author of biographies on actresses Marie Dressler and Joan Blondell as well as on director Edmund Goulding.



MR. FIX-IT

Live Accompaniment by Dennis James on the Mighty Wurlitzer

CAST: Douglas Fairbanks (Dick Remington/"Mr. Fix-It"), Wanda Hawley (Mary McCollough), Marjorie Daw (Marjorie Threadwell), Frank Campeau (Uncle Henry Burroughs), Katherine MacDonald (Georgiana Burroughs), Leslie Stuart (Reginald Burroughs), Ida Waterman (Aunt Agatha Burroughs), Alice Smith (Aunt Priscilla Burroughs), Mrs. H.R. Hancock (Aunt Laura Burroughs), Mr. Russell (Butler Jarvis), Fred Goodwins (Gideon Van Tassell), Margaret Landis (Olive Van Tassell) PRODUCTION: Douglas Fairbanks Pictures Corporation 1918 SCENARIO: Allan Dwan, from a story suggested by Ernest Butterworth DIRECTION: Allan Dwan PHOTOGRAPHY: Hugh McClung PRINT SOURCE: George Eastman House

Preceded by the orphan film **Chumming with Chipmunks** (1921).

When production began early in 1918 on *Mr. Fix-It*, the world was in the grip of the Great War, the fires of revolution were burning in Russia and Mexico, and modernism was turning the art world upside down. France and Germany, two centers of world cinema, were devastated, and, while Hollywood was affected, film production was by no means interrupted. In fact, a fruitful collaboration between an ingenious director and a charismatic star who helped define American silent cinema was well underway.

Director Allan Dwan was two years younger than Douglas Fairbanks but entered filmmaking about six years earlier than the actor. In 1909, while working as an arc light specialist for a lighting company, Dwan delivered four mercury vapor tube lights to Essanay Studios in Chicago. While on the set ensuring the equipment worked properly,

Sponsored by Wells Fargo

he became fascinated with the filmmaking process. When he found out the going rate for producible stories ($25 each), he sold Essanay a few of his own. Soon he was working at the studio as a scenario editor, and, when most of the staff left to form the American Film Manufacturing Company, they asked Dwan to be the chief scenario editor. He spent a few months in Arizona functioning "as a sort of unit manager ... and work[ing] on stories," until management sacked the Tucson operation. Rehired in 1911, he was sent to California to check on a stalled production and discovered that the director had decamped to Los Angeles "on a binge." When he wired the home office about it, he received the reply: "You direct."

From May 1911 until late 1915, working for American, Universal, Famous Players, and then Triangle, Dwan directed and/or wrote hundreds of films, most of them split- or one-reelers. Many were features running four or five reels. At a time when the industry had not yet settled on standard procedures and formats, Dwan learned to insist on autonomy, and he built steadily on his experience of innovating by doing. He's generally credited with moving the static camera in Famous Players' production of *David Harum* (1915). At Triangle, on D.W. Griffith's *Intolerance* (1916), Dwan figured out how to photograph the sprawling Babylon set.

Douglas Fairbanks was the creation of Coloradoan Douglas Elton Ulman. Born in 1883, he was renamed by his thrice-married mother to honor her first husband, John Fairbanks. A born risk-taker with a fondness for dangerous stunts, he began appearing on stage in school and in local theater productions, joining a touring company in 1899. At the age of 19, Fairbanks headed for New York, where his first starring role caught the eye of actress Grace George, whose husband William A. Brady was a successful producer. Brady enjoyed watching the now 22-year old working off his backstage boredom with acrobatic feats, like climbing up and down a long staircase set on his hands. Soon the actor began to work such physical bits into his scenes, and audiences began to expect them as part of Brady's productions.

In the summer of 1907, a 24-year-old Fairbanks married Beth Sully and, two years later, the couple had a son. On stage, Fairbanks continued to flourish in action-packed comedies, occasionally working at his father-in-law's soap factory. Fairbanks family lore has it that a chance encounter in Central Park with a motion picture cameraman resulted in some footage of Fairbanks's athletic capering being seen by Harry Aitken, cofounder of the new Triangle Film Corporation. In fact, Aitken and Fairbanks had already been in discussions and, on the strength of his New York stage successes, Fairbanks went west in the summer of 1915. His first Triangle release, *The Lamb* (1915), was a hit, and he returned to New York, where he attended the film's premiere that September. Soon after, he met Mary Pickford for the first time at the home of a mutual friend.

"The one thing that could possibly interest either one of us was a swift, graceful move—the thing a kid visualizes in his hero."

Triangle Film Corporation put its full weight behind its new star. D.W. Griffith at least nominally supervised the new player's projects, some of which were scripted by up-and-comers Anita Loos and John Emerson. Fairbanks's fourth film at Triangle was *The Habit of Happiness* (1916), the first of eleven collaborations with Allan Dwan. The two men shared an immediate affinity. "Stunts per se were of no interest to him or to me," Dwan later said. "The one thing that could possibly interest either one of us was a swift, graceful move—the thing a kid visualizes in his hero." Fairbanks also became involved in the scriptwriting process, as Anita Loos recalled in 1939: "[H]e sat in on the writing and contributed as much as we did. ... No writer could object to having help from a brain as fertile, as stimulating and as original in its story conceptions as Doug's."

In early February 1918, production was about to begin on *Mr. Fix-It*, a comedy in which Fairbanks impersonates his Oxford roommate to save the friend's inheritance. By this time, Douglas Fairbanks Pictures Corporation (formed a year earlier) had already produced seven pictures. Despite the autonomy that owning his work enabled, Fairbanks himself was more concerned with the war effort. He had tried to enlist when the war broke out but, according to Douglas Fairbanks Jr., "the White House intervened" on his father's behalf, as he could contribute more as a celebrity fundraiser than as a soldier. Frederic Lombardi, author of the forthcoming book *Allan Dwan: Pioneer in Exile*, explains that there was some urgency on the set of *Mr. Fix-It* because Fairbanks was scheduled for a nationwide tour to sell war bonds. The shoot was able to proceed more quickly because Dwan's script required, as Lombardi notes, "mostly interior settings. Since film stock was not fast enough at that time to shoot outdoor night scenes, filming in both day and night could be done only with interiors. ... The film's 'exteriors' included New York streets constructed in a studio."



Doug, the happy center of the action

The picture opened at New York's Rivoli Theatre on April 15, 1918. Fairbanks, Pickford, and Charlie Chaplin (soon to found United Artists with D.W. Griffith) had been in New York since the previous week for a Liberty Loan rally that attracted thousands. No one in the crowd knew that Pickford and Fairbanks had been secret lovers for more than a year. "The King of Hollywood" and "America's Sweetheart" finally married in 1920.

In 1918, Dwan and Fairbanks made two more pictures as producer and star: *Bound in Morocco* and *He Comes Up Smiling*. But their greatest work was still ahead. *Douglas Fairbanks in Robin Hood* (1922) included complex action sequences and an elaborate castle set that dwarfed Griffith's Babylon set for *Intolerance*. Their final collaboration, *The Iron Mask* (1929), was another action-packed spectacle that combined the stories of *The Three Musketeers* and *The Man in the Iron Mask*. It also marked the beginning of the star's decline. Fairbanks's first sound picture was limited to brief appearances as D'Artagnan in which the aging musketeer fittingly bids farewell. Dwan went on to a career that spanned five decades, touching on nearly every film genre. But he was particularly proud of his silent career, telling Peter Bogdanovich in the late '60s, "There wasn't any comparison—there was nothing we could do except make it up—and that's inspiration."

–Roberto Landazuri

Roberto Landazuri is the corporate archivist at Dolby Laboratories Inc. and has written on historical topics for the Smithsonian, the San Francisco Public Library, and the University of California, Berkeley, among many institutions.



THE WOMAN MEN YEARN FOR

Live Accompaniment by the Mont Alto Motion Picture Orchestra

CAST: Marlene Dietrich (Stascha), Fritz Kortner (Dr. Karoff), Uno Henning (Henri Leblanc), Frida Richard (Frau Leblanc), Oskar Sima (Charles Leblanc), Edith Edwards (Angèle), Karl Ettlinger (Her father), Bruno Zienner (Philipp, the valet) PRODUCTION: Terra Film 1929 PRODUCER: Hermann Grund DIRECTOR: Kurt Bernhardt SCENARIO: Ladislaus Vajda, based on the novel by Max Brod ORIGINAL LANGUAGE TITLE: *Die Frau, nach der man sich sehnt* PHOTOGRAPHY: Kurt Courant PRINT SOURCE: Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau Foundation, with assistance from Transit Film GmbH

Two decades after Marlene Dietrich's death, her legend still retains its allure. One persistent myth is that Josef von Sternberg created Dietrich the Seductress in *Der blaue Engel* (*The Blue Angel*, 1930), when in fact Dietrich herself had been carefully crafting her public persona long before von Sternberg. By 1929, she was already a star of stage and screen in Germany, and her first fully realized femme fatale was not *The Blue Angel*'s Lola Lola, but Stascha in *Die Frau, nach der man sich sehnt* (*The Woman Men Yearn For*), her first top-billing.

Even as a child, Dietrich felt comfortable in the spotlight. Born Marie Magdalene Dietrich in December 1901 in a Berlin suburb, she was the second daughter of a military man turned police officer and a bourgeois housewife who insisted on propriety. Nicknamed "Lene" by her family, the young girl elided her first and middle names into the more glamorous "Marlene," writing the new name on the covers of her school notebooks. She studied violin and, at age 19, landed her first job as violinist and concert mistress with the Universum Film AG studio orchestra, which played live for films at Ufa-owned theaters. The composer-conductor later said that he fired her after only four weeks because her legs distracted the otherwise all-male orchestra.

Undaunted, Dietrich continued to put those distracting legs to good use, dancing in the cabaret shows that were ubiquitous in postwar Berlin. Not satisfied with being just another chorus girl, Dietrich decided in 1922 to enroll in Max Reinhardt's prestigious Deutsches Theaterschule. Although she claimed to have auditioned for Reinhardt himself, it wasn't true. According to Steven Bach's well-researched biography, *Marlene Dietrich: Life and Legend* (1992), she did audition, but for a staff member, who rejected her. She did take private lessons at the school and was soon playing small roles in the Reinhardt repertory company. She also began playing bit parts in movies, making her celluloid debut as a giggly servant in 1922's *Der kleine Napoleon* (*The Little Napoleon*).

During this period, Dietrich met Rudolf Sieber, an aspiring actor and assistant to independent film producer-director Joe May. Sieber helped Dietrich land a few small film roles, and the two were married in 1923. Dietrich continued to work in both theater and films, taking a break when she gave birth to a daughter. The couple was very much a part of the frenetic, pansexual Berlin social life of the era, and Dietrich took both male and female lovers. When she wanted to return to work, her reputation as a party girl resulted in her typecasting as jazz babies and glamour girls.

In 1926, Dietrich had her first singing role in the revue *From Mouth to Mouth*, which proved to be a career changer. The actress in the leading role of Mistress of Ceremonies got sick, and Dietrich went on in her place. It led to a small but showy role as a chorus girl in the Vienna production of the American hit *Broadway* and an important part in the film *Café Electric* (1927). Critics called her "a spirited and gifted actress" and "most provocative."

Back in Berlin in 1928, Dietrich finally became a star, thanks to both the revue *It's in the Air* and the film *Princess O-la-la*. Reviews of the latter compared her to Garbo, and one critic wrote, "An entire generation of hollow temptresses can be dethroned by this actress." Dietrich's next stage appearance was in George Bernard Shaw's *Misalliance*. The production's leading lady Lili Darvas observed Dietrich's ability to stand perfectly still on stage and yet be the focus of attention.

"THIS IS THE FILM IN WHICH MARLENE FOUND 'DIETRICH,' THOUGH SHE MAY NOT HAVE KNOWN SHE HAD."

"She possessed the most important quality for a Star: She could be great without doing anything at all." It was a quality that was most effectively exploited in *The Woman Men Yearn For*. Bach calls the film "the first to capture her sympathetic eroticism and aura of ambiguity and mystery .... This is the film in which Marlene found 'Dietrich,' though she may not have known she had."

In *The Woman Men Yearn For*, Henri marries a rich girl to save the family business. About to depart for his honeymoon, he catches a glimpse of a woman through a frosted train window. Their eyes lock. It is the film's first image of Dietrich, who is traveling to an Alpine resort with her lover, and it sets in motion all that follows. Dietrich's impassive gaze seduces with its mystery and stillness and makes credible Henri's impulsive decision to follow her. She reveals nothing but still projects a powerful eroticism.

The Woman Men Yearn For was directed by Kurt Bernhardt, who took credit for discovering Dietrich, although she was hardly an unknown at the time. Bernhardt had absorbed the expressionist style and used it effectively in the early scenes of Henri's family factory and in the frenzied gaiety of the New Year's Eve revelers. Years later, he was

still miffed that Dietrich ignored his direction. "She never moved her head from the spotlight .... She was so well aware of the lighting, right from the beginning." Dietrich had been experimenting with her look in a Berlin photo booth and had found that a single overhead light accented her cheekbones and de-emphasized her upturned nose.

By the time *The Woman Men Yearn For* opened in April 1929, the critics were clamoring for sound. "We see the lips, they say something, they move, [but] we hear nothing," one wrote of the little-seen film. About Dietrich's performance, critics were brutal: "expressionless malice in every look, every movement studied, and all of it without personality," wrote another. When the film opened in New York in September as *Three Loves*, the *New York Times* critic was more impressed: "[It] possesses the kind of direction that makes American film magnates cable contracts abroad .... In addition, it boasts of a noteworthy performer in the person of Fritz Kortner, and a rare Garboesque beauty in Marlene Dietrich."



Dietrich as Lola Lola in *The Blue Angel*

Depressed by the bad domestic reviews, Dietrich threw herself into work. She completed two more silent films before returning to the stage in another revue, where Josef von Sternberg saw her in September 1929 and knew he had found his Lola Lola. At first, Dietrich appeared disinterested, telling von Sternberg that she had made only three films (she had made 17) and that she photographed badly. But once the camera rolled, she was transformed. Her insolence and energy in the screen test confirmed von Sternberg's instinct about her, and she left for Hollywood immediately after *Der blaue Engel*'s premiere in Berlin.

A huge Dietrich fan, Adolf Hitler tried to woo her back in the years just before World War II. He promised to make her queen of Third Reich cinema, but she refused, staying in the States where she showed a flair for comedy in films such as Ernst Lubitsch's *Angel* (1937) and *Destry Rides Again* (1939). When she died in 1992, obituaries hailed her as the biggest international film star Germany ever produced.

In his memoirs, Edward G. Robinson, who costarred with Dietrich in *Manpower* (1941), wrote about her as an actress: "I am not sure I would call it talent; it is something beyond that—mystery, unavailability, distance, feminine mystique." Dietrich herself shrugged off her image, saying "Glamour is what I sell, it's my stock in trade," insisting, "I am not a myth."

–Margarita Landazuri



SHOES

Live Accompaniment by Dennis James on the Mighty Wurlitzer

CAST: Mary MacLaren (Eva Meyer), Mattie Witting (Her mother), Harry Griffith (Her father), Jessie Arnold (Lil), William V. Mong ("Cabaret" Charlie) PRODUCTION: Universal Film Manufacturing Company's Bluebird Photoplays 1916 PRODUCERS: Lois Weber and Phillips Smalley DIRECTOR: Lois Weber SCREENPLAY: Lois Weber, suggested by the book *A New Conscience for an Ancient Evil* by Jane Addams and the story "Shoes" by Stella Wynne Herron PHOTOGRAPHY: Stephen S. Norton, King D. Gray, Allen G. Siegler PRINT SOURCE: Eye Film Institute Netherlands

Preceded by the 1924 orphan film **Tribune-American Dream Picture**

"When the history of the dramatic early development of motion pictures is written," declared *Motion Picture* magazine in 1921, "Lois Weber will occupy a unique position." Lois Weber was not only America's first major female film director, she was a true pioneer. She began her career when the longest films ran 20 minutes and directed her last feature a quarter century later in 1934. Her filmmaking concentrated on dramatic subjects and included more than 60 features and countless short films. But her greatest fame and most lasting impact came as a result of her "social problem" films, made between 1914 and 1921, which took courageous stands on controversial issues. Noted for their artistry and realism, her films raised the status of moviegoing, making it respectable for middle-class audiences.

The product of a deeply religious family and a veteran of the Church Army Workers, Lois Weber saw film not only as entertainment, but also as a medium for evangelizing about important social issues. In her 1913 lecture "The Making of Picture Plays That Will Have an Influence for Good on the Public Mind," Weber described her use of film's "voiceless language" to "carry out the idea of missionary pictures." Abortion, birth control,

capital punishment, religious hypocrisy, a living wage, child labor, prostitution, and white slavery were all topics that Weber addressed in her films.

Despite her emphasis on social issues, it would be a mistake to stereotype Weber as a woman on a soapbox. Her films were well scripted, well acted, highly popular, and financially successful. In 1915, Weber and her husband Phillips Smalley produced *Hypocrites*, which decried religious hypocrisy and featured the allegorical figure of "The Naked Truth," portrayed by what one reviewer described as "a naked girl, about 18 years of age." Although there were calls for censorship in some locales, the film was generally hailed as an artistic and cultural milestone. The *New York Evening Journal* described the film as "the most startlingly satisfying and vividly wonderful creation of the screen age." In her 2006 book *Women Filmmakers in Early Hollywood*, historian Karen Ward Mahar cites *Hypocrites* as a landmark that helped legitimize film as an art form.

Weber was Universal Film Company's highest paid director when she made her most controversial film *Where Are My Children?* (1916). Released during the same summer in which Margaret Sanger was jailed for promoting family planning, Weber's film advocated birth control and also decried abortion as murder. Critics generally praised the film, with the *New York Dramatic Mirror* noting, "It is not often that a subject as delicate as the one which this picture treats is handled as boldly yet, at the same time, as inoffensively as is the case with this production." *Where Are My Children?* sparked controversy and court actions across the country. One Pennsylvania censor declared the film "not fit for decent people to see" and banned screenings in the state.

Universal released *Shoes*, under the banner of its Bluebird Photoplay productions, on June 12, 1916, just one month after *Where Are My Children?* In *Shoes*, Eva Meyer is poorly paid shop-girl who works in a five-and-dime. She is the sole wage earner for her family of three sisters, their mother, and a father unwilling to find work. At the end of each week, Eva dutifully hands over her meager earnings to her mother. Eva's salary barely covers the grocer's bill and cannot provide for nice clothes or decent shoes like those of her coworkers. She becomes increasingly disheartened and begins to consider the uninvited advances of Charlie, a cad with clearly dishonorable intentions.

Weber adapted her script for *Shoes* from a short story by Stella Wynne Herron published in the January 1, 1916, issue of *Collier's* magazine. The film follows Herron's narrative closely, with dialogue from the story occasionally appearing verbatim in the film's intertitles. Herron's inspiration for her story came from social reformer Jane Addams's 1912 book on prostitution *A New Conscience and an Ancient Evil*, which Herron quotes in her epigraph: "When the shoes became too worn to endure a third soling and she possessed but 90 cents toward a new pair, she gave up the struggle; to use her own contemptuous phrase, she 'sold out for a new pair of shoes.'"

"SHE SOLD OUT FOR A NEW PAIR OF SHOES."

Film scholar Shelley Stamp asserts, "Weber's interest in the fate of underpaid retail clerks echoed many sociological studies of the era that investigated the 'problem' of young female wage earners." In one such study, social reformer Louise De Koven Bowen focused specifically on department store girls "surrounded by, and selling, the luxuries they crave for a wage compensation inadequate for a life of decency and respectability." According to Bowen's 1911 report, these daily temptations could lead to the girls' "moral as well as physical breakdown." Weber described the impetus for making *Shoes* in an interview given to *Moving Picture World* during the film's production: "I did missionary work in the slums of New York … especially among young girls .... I know them and their problems, and not a few of my stories have been suggested by incidents recalled from those early experiences."

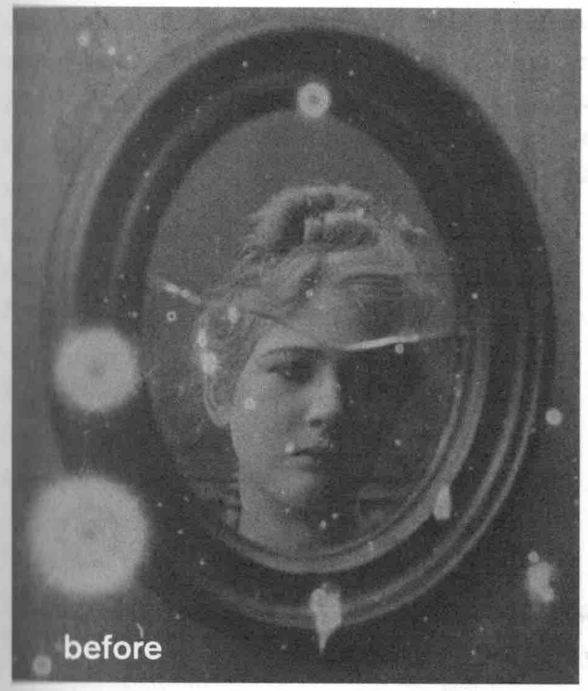
The motion picture press reacted positively to Weber's new feature but remained cautious about its commercial appeal. *Wid's Independent Review of Feature Films* praised "the splendid psychology of the development of the characters" but recommended eliminating one of the flashbacks that conclude the film. *Motion Picture News* appreciated Weber's realism but noted that "there is such a thing as being too realistic." These advance reviews may have tempered their endorsement, but the popular press lauded the film and its fledgling star Mary MacLaren. The *Los Angeles Times* described *Shoes* as "the greatest photoplay which Lois Weber has ever produced" and singled out Mary MacLaren's "perfection of acting." Louella Parsons declared *Shoes* one of the best films of 1916. The public apparently agreed, as *Shoes* was Universal's most-booked Bluebird production of the year.

In 1916, *Motion Picture Stories* declared Weber "the greatest woman director" and the *New York Dramatic Mirror* listed her as one of the top six directors in the entire industry. Today, she is less well known than many of her contemporaries. Only a handful of her films survive and even fewer are available for theatrical presentation. The only known original print of *Shoes* resides in an underground bunker in Overveen in the collection of the Eye Film Institute in the Netherlands. Like Eva Meyer's shoes, time has not been kind to this only surviving copy. By the time *Shoes* arrived at the archive, the nitrate film stock had deteriorated dramatically and the photographic emulsion was under attack by mold and bacteria. In 2008, the institute undertook a two-year project to restore the film digitally, creating the 35mm print premiering at this year's festival.

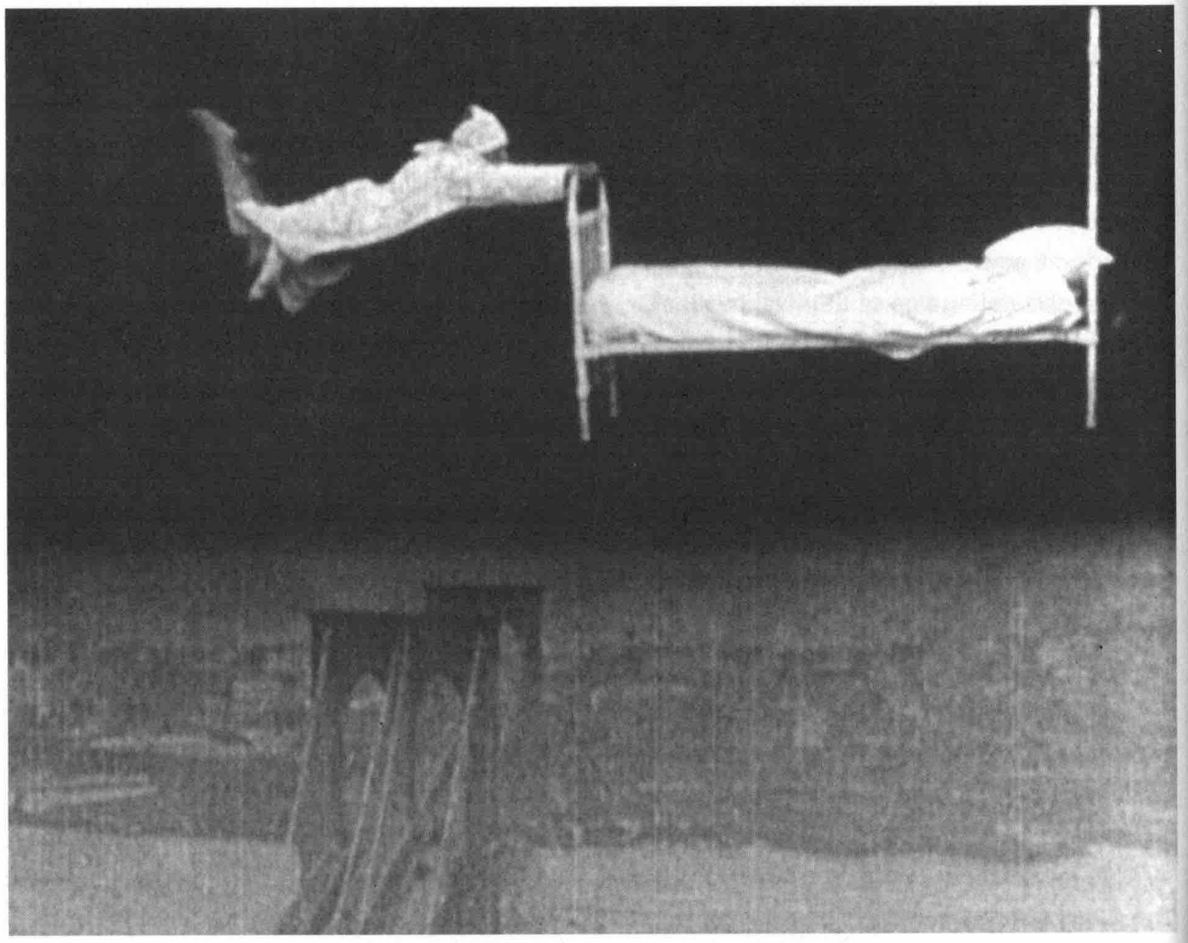
In 1913, Lois Weber described her desire to "raise the standard" of film and "bring back refined audiences." At a time when the courts had declared movies "a pure entertainment business" unworthy of First Amendment protection, Weber stood with the vanguard that was striving to bring cultural legitimacy to the medium. While some of the issues she explored may seem Victorian by today's standards, her groundbreaking work helped establish motion pictures as the definitive visual art of the 20th century.

–Rob Byrne

President of the Silent Film Festival board of directors, Rob Byrne is a film preservationist and researcher who participated in the restoration of Shoes. *His blog Starts Thursday! covers coming attraction slides in early cinema.*







WILD AND WEIRD

Short Film Favorites with New Music Performed Live by Alloy Orchestra

Camera-wielding insects, taunting red devils, monstrously large pets — since its inception, cinema has been aligned with the fantastic. Early pioneers of special effects developed cinematic "tricks"— cross-dissolves, stop-motion animation, matte shots, even the close-up — that became the building blocks of filmmaking and then were wholeheartedly adopted by narrative cinema and experimented with by the avant-garde. While France's Georges Méliès may be the best known of these early purveyors of cinéma fantastique, *he was by no means alone. In England, Eastern Europe, and the United States, artists and inventors were busy in their studios, labs, and on location creating cinematic fantasies, expanding the tools for moviemaking and, at the same time, breaching the limits of imagination.*

DREAM OF A RAREBIT FIEND (1906)

In charge of production at Edison, Edwin S. Porter summoned all the tricks of early cinema to depict the nightmarish effects of too much rich food and drink before bed in this adaptation of an episode in Winsor McCay's well-known comic strip. To create the sensation of drunkenness, he used a spinning camera and moveable set pieces, along with double- and triple-exposures. When the fiend, played by Jack Brawn, retires, his clothes and furniture flee in stop-motion, and he later flies over the Brooklyn Bridge courtesy of mattes. A machinist and electrician in the days before electrical current was standardized, Porter was a resourceful technician, joining Thomas Edison's company in 1899, where he built on the special effects pioneered by Georges Méliès. The year following Méliès's *A Trip to the Moon*, Porter's *Life of an American Fireman* combined stock footage with acted scenes and featured the same kind of noncontinuous editing as in Méliès's film.

Sponsored by Flicker Alley and Film Preservation Associates



LE SPECTRE ROUGE (1907)

Charles Pathé installed former cornet player Ferdinand Zecca as head of production at Pathé Frères in 1900 after he successfully helped set up Pathé's pavilion at the Paris Exposition Universelle. In 1902, Zecca hired Segundo de Chomón, Méliès's distributor in Spain and Latin America. Chomón was fascinated by the possibilities of color and, in 1901, he opened a lab in his Barcelona home for hand-tinting films. He did the meticulous tinting for this devilish film, and the influence of Méliès is apparent in the stop-motion photography and dissolves. Chomón stumbled across stop-motion animation in 1902 while shooting title cards. He didn't notice a fly on one of the cards until the film was developed and the fly seemed to jump from place to place. Chomón worked on many films, including as cinematographer for *Il fuoco* (1915) and on special effects for Abel Gance's *Napoleon* (1927). Zecca supervised the production of hundreds of Pathé films, later editing Méliès's films for distribution.

THE ACROBATIC FLY (1908)

Frank Percy Smith became fascinated with the educational possibilities of film while creating lantern slides of plant and animal life for the London Board of Education. Encouraged by film entrepreneur Charles Urban, he left his job and began to tinker with cameras, devising his own time-lapse and macro-cinematography equipment, and even a machine that set off alarms around the house when the film magazine needed changing. For *The Acrobatic Fly*, he built tiny props for his star to "juggle," a ball, a cork, even a barbell. *Birth of a Flower* (1910–11) was the first of more than 50 natural history films distributed by Urban as the popular series Secrets of Nature. These early documentaries adapted easily to sound, and the series continued until Smith's death in 1945.



THE THIEVING HAND (1908)

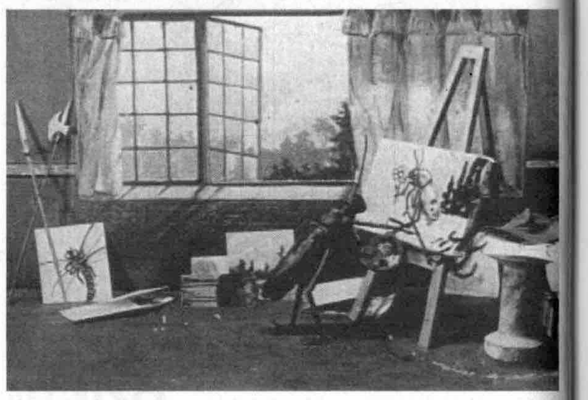
Using a special cutout platform, stop-motion photography, and the gymnastic skills of Paul Panzer's left arm, this film about a prosthetic limb with a mind of its own was made at J. Stuart Blackton's Vitagraph studio in Flatbush, New York. Blackton met Thomas Edison in 1896 while working as a journalist and cartoonist in New York. Impressed with Blackton's drawings, Edison filmed him for *Blackton, the Evening World Cartoonist* (1896). Blackton bought a kinetoscope from Edison and went on to form the Vitagraph Company with Albert E. Smith (a spiritualist) and Ronald Reader (a magician), making movies on the roof of the Morse building. In 1906, the company moved to a custom-built glass studio in Flatbush, Brooklyn, where Blackton pioneered stop-frame animation. Blackton later dismissed the very work he pioneered as "juvenile." In 1917, he wrote, "I fear I have outgrown my joy in lens magic as a thing by itself. Camera tricks are all right, but they have reached a point where they must interpret, not divert."



PRINCESS NICOTINE, OR THE SMOKE FAIRY (1909)
Another Vitagraph production featuring Paul Panzer, *Princess Nicotine* is notable for its use of stop-motion and a two-lens camera. The little girls and their oversized props were farther from the camera than Panzer, and all the actors' movements had to have been coordinated, perhaps by the director or by a metronome. The German-born Panzer got his start acting in Blackton's early films, including adaptations of Shakespeare's plays. After Vitagraph, his most famous role came as the villain to Pearl White in *The Perils of Pauline* serial. He played bit parts in Hollywood until the early 1950s.

ARTHÈME SWALLOWS HIS CLARINET (1912)
Ernest Servaes directed and starred in the Arthème series of comedies for the French company Eclipse from 1911 through 1916. In this film, the comic hero has an unfortunate encounter with some furniture movers, and freeze-frame photography is used to replace the real clarinet with a specially made prop that gives the impression that Arthème is impaled on his instrument. Miraculously, he finds that he can still play and makes the most of the situation. By 1910, Eclipse was the fourth largest producer of French films and one of the many French production companies to set up offices in Germany, opening a branch in Berlin in 1906, just a year after its founding.

THE CAMERAMAN'S REVENGE (1912)
In his association with the Natural History Museum in Kovno, Lithuania, Wladyslaw Starewicz made a series of short live-action documentaries about local customs. His interest in entomology led him to try filming a fight between stag beetles, but the bright lights rendered the nocturnal insects immobile. Inspired by Emil Cohl's *Animated Matches* (1908), Starewicz decided to re-create the beetles' encounter using stop-motion. By stuffing the beetles and replacing their legs with wires attached to their thorax with sealing wax, he built insect puppets with articulated limbs. The result was *Lucanus Cervus* (1910). Making these films was a painstaking process, requiring 500 single-frame exposures for 30 seconds of film. In 1911, he moved to Moscow, where he made two dozen



films at Aleksandr Khanzhonkov's studio, of which *The Cameraman's Revenge* (1912) is the best known. This stop-motion masterpiece incorporates not only detailed sets and believable characters, but also a film-within-a-film. After the Russian Revolution, Starewicz and his family emigrated to Paris, where he helped set up Ermol'ev-Cinéma in Méliès's old studio.

DREAMS OF A RAREBIT FIEND: THE PET (1921)
Best known as the creator of the long-running comic series "Little Nemo in Slumberland," Winsor McCay began as an illustrator for newspaper stories and features. His first comic strips appeared in the *Evening Telegram*, among them "Dreams of a Rarebit Fiend," which ran 1904–1913. He signed them "Silas," as they covered darker, more adult themes than his other child-oriented works. By 1909, he was making animated films in his private studio in Brooklyn. His hand-drawn animation *Gertie the Dinosaur* (1914) is often referred to as the first cartoon with a lifelike, appealing main character. Similar in technique to the less sophisticated *Gertie*, *The Pet* was hand-drawn by McCay himself.

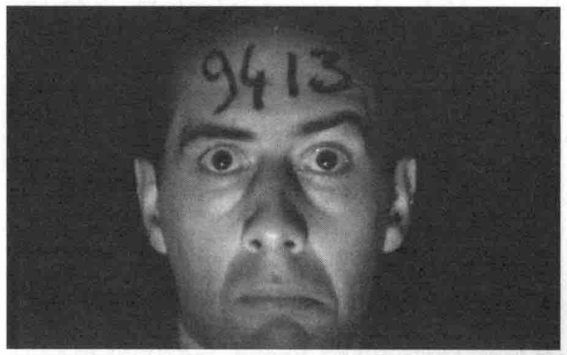


FILMSTUDIE (1925)
Born in Berlin in 1888, painter Hans Richter was part of the German avant-garde that took cinema seriously as an art form. In 1916, he joined the short-lived Dada movement based in Zurich, where he befriended Viking Eggeling. As part of their experiments in abstract painting, the two created scroll paintings and eventually tried to animate them. The dreamlike *Filmstudie* actually marks the end of Richter's attention to pure abstraction. Along with simple shapes, negative exposures, and the play of light and shadow, he incorporates photographs of actual objects, refracting some through a prism. His next film, *Ghosts Before Breakfast* (1927–28), used stop-motion and trick film techniques to create an absurdist world in the spirit of the French surrealists. He left Germany in 1933, eventually settling in the United States, where he influenced the American avant-garde as a teacher at New York's City College. He once wrote that his generation of abstract artists approached the new art form "with the energy of pioneers, the curiosity of explorers, and the unperturbed objectivity of scientists."

LIFE AND DEATH OF 9413, A HOLLYWOOD EXTRA (1928)
A collaboration of Paris-born Robert Florey, Serbian émigré Slavko Vorkapich, and American cameraman Gregg Toland, this expressionist film reveals the dark side of trying to make it in Hollywood. The idea for the film came to Florey, then doubling as an assistant director at MGM and a journalist, after seeing a performance of Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*. Lit only with a single 400-watt bulb, the film was made over the course of three weeks in Vorkapich's kitchen and edited to the rhythms of Gershwin's composition. Shots of miniature sets made from children's toys, matchboxes, paper cubes, and tin cans were intercut with documentary footage of Hollywood itself. Cutout text, stop-motion, and double exposures convey the struggling actor's mental state. The total budget: $97. Producer Joseph Schenck was so impressed he arranged for a big premiere with live orchestral accompaniment and a limited distribution run. All three collaborators went on to major careers. Toland became a celebrated Hollywood cinematographer, most famous for the deep-focus photography of *Citizen Kane*. Vorkapich became a widely respected film theorist and special-effects expert, perfecting montage sequences in feature films. Scripts used the notation "vorkapich" to indicate where such sequences should occur. Florey directed more than 50 movies over the next 23 years, from the Marx Brothers' *The Cocoanuts* (1929) to *The Beast with Five Fingers* (1947). Featuring Jules Racourt as "9413," George Voya as "Star," and Adriane Marsh as "13," *Life and Death* was one of the few experimental films to achieve success in mainstream Hollywood. Florey later remade it as the feature *Hollywood Boulevard* (1936).

–Victoria Jaschob

Victoria Jaschob has worked in the computer animation industry for the past 15 years. This is her third year contributing to the Silent Film Festival program book.







THE NAIL IN THE BOOT
and CHESS FEVER
Live Piano and Accordion Accompaniment by Stephen Horne

NAIL IN THE BOOT CAST: Aleksandr Zhaliashvili (A worker), Siko Palavandishvili (Soldier of the Red Army), Akaki Khorava (Prosecutor), Arkadi Khintibidze (Commander of the armored train) PRODUCTION: Goskinprom Gruzii 1932 DIRECTOR: Mikheil Kalatozishvili, as Mikhail Kalatozov SCENARIO: Leonid Perelman ORIGINAL LANGUAGE TITLE: *Lursmani Cheqmashi* PHOTOGRAPHY: Shalva Apakidze SET DESIGN: Serapion Vatsadze PRINT SOURCE: Georgian National Film Center

CHESS FEVER (*Shakhmatnaya goryachka*), a Mezhrabpom-Rus production from 1925, with Vladimir Fogel as the Hero and Anna Zemtsova as the Heroine. Codirected by Vsevolod Pudovkin, who also edited, and Nikolai Shpikovsky, who wrote the scenario. Photography by Anatoli Golovnya. Print courtesy of Contemporary Films Ltd.

Program preceded by the orphan film **Madison News Reel** (c.1932)

The question "Who is Kalatozov?" has reverberated through international film circles at least three times in the past century. In 1958, when his *The Cranes Are Flying* became the first Russian film to garner the coveted Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival. Then again in the early 1990s, when his neglected *I Am Cuba* (1964) was re-released through the efforts of Francis Coppola and Martin Scorsese and hailed for its camera virtuosity. And, most recently in 2010, at the first retrospective of Kalatozov's silent films at Italy's Le Giornate del Cinema Muto, whose curators issued a worldwide call to evaluate Kalatozov's entire body of work, much of which was banned or publicly slandered by Soviet censors. For instance, his *Salt for Svanetia* (1930), shot in remote mountains of the Georgian Caucasus, was repressed by censors who complained that "the visual aspect of the film did not adequately serve [its] ideological purpose." Only *The Cranes Are Flying*, made during the post-Stalin thaw, and the official films he made during his years of forced "rehabilitation" were spared accusations of formalism.

Born in 1903, Kalatozov was a contemporary of Kuleshov, Pudovkin, Eisenstein, and Vertov, the pioneer filmmakers who inaugurated the "Golden Age" of Soviet cinema in the 1920s. Yet both his background and entry into production circles were different from theirs. Kalatozov, whose real name is Kalatozishvili, was born and grew up in Tbilisi, Georgia. While he was exposed to the artistic avant-garde of his hometown, Kalatozov studied economics first before deciding to seek work in cinema in the early 1920s. Distant from Moscow, Russia's filmmaking capital, Kalatozov was unable to join the experimental workshops such as that of Lev Kuleshov, then testing his theories of montage and the actor as mannequin. He finally met Kuleshov in 1926 when he worked as a cameraman under Kuleshov's direction on the aborted project *Steam Engine B-1000*. Kalatozov became, as he put it, Kuleshov's "disciple" after Kuleshov publicly declared that "Kalatozov could shoot anything and make it interesting." With his mentor's endorsement, Kalatozov rose quickly through the ranks of Goskinprom Gruzii, the Russian-supported studio in Tbilisi, an early effort to extend the Russian film industry to the Caucasus, then undergoing a process of Russianization. Kalatozishvili's transformation into Kalatozov reflects either his desire or need—even in egalitarian, revolutionary Russian film circles—to be seen as Russian.

At Goskinprom Gruzii, Kalatozov worked as a driver, a projectionist, lab assistant, film splicer, editor, actor, and, finally, as an assistant cameraman, getting hands-on instruction and experience in all aspects of studio work. At the same time, he absorbed the radical new film theories circulating among Moscow's filmmakers. Sergei Eisenstein's "conflict montage" proposed juxtaposing shots to collide with each other rather than to create seamless transitions. Dziga Vertov was proselytizing his approach to documentary, which he described as "fragments of actuality on film [that], when organized together, can reveal a deeper truth that cannot be seen with the naked eye." Esfir Shub provided a new model for the compilation film when she synthesized both Eisenstein and Vertov's styles to re-create history out of archival footage with 1928's *The Fall of the Romanov Empire*.

For *The Nail in the Boot*, Kalatozov also borrowed from across the spectrum of the avant-garde, which had broken from traditional art forms. The film's acting style was influenced by the circus-like plays staged by Vsevolod Meyerhold, whose "bio-mechanical" view of the actor's body contrasted sharply with the naturalistic acting of Stanislavsky's Moscow Art Theater. The influence of Aleksandr Tairov's constructivist theater, Kamerny ("Chamber"), which used geometric forms as both symbolic and decorative elements, can be seen in the composition of Kalatozov's images. Kalatozov's use of the camera to emphasize the poetic, metaphoric meanings in the image came in part from the Futurists. Above it all hovered Stalin's dark warning that the filmmaker must communicate a film's themes and its socialist aspirations so clearly that even illiterate audiences would understand them.

Made for the military's studio, *Nail in the Boot* is about a Soviet soldier ordered to rescue a stranded train and its soldiers. But, as loyal as he is, he cannot execute the order because his poorly made combat boots cripple him. During the soldier's subsequent court martial, he protests that blame must be shared with the boot makers. The censors must have detected a plea by Kalatozov to the Soviet authorities (perhaps even a complaint) to improve the gear of the soldiers in the trenches and treat them with more compassion. That the Soviet people deserved better was a notion the director had already implied in his earlier film about the salt-starved Svanetians.

Predictably, Soviet censors banned *Nail in the Boot*, issuing the same criticism they had made about Svanetia: "Kalatozov did not apply the revolutionary method of dialectical materialism to his theme but proceeded from formalistic aestheticism." The authorities prohibited Kalatozov from directing his own projects, and he accepted an administrative post at Goskinprom in Tbilisi, where he produced seven films between 1931 and the release of *Cranes* in 1957, none of which were seen in the West. Based on their approval by

"KALATOZOV COULD SHOOT ANYTHING AND MAKE IT INTERESTING."

state censors and on the written descriptions of their patriotic motifs, these films are assumed to be part of Kalatozov's "rehabilitation" period enforced to correct his ideological errors. Yet these censor-approved films may bear Kalatozov's artistic mark. The Soviet filmmakers who adopted and understood the poetic strategies of the Russian avant-garde—their use of metaphor, symbolism, and irony—were well served by them in creating films with multiple meanings.

SEEN THROUGH THE LENS OF HISTORY, THESE FILMS ARE STILL REVOLUTIONARY.

By 1936, Kalatozov was awarded the studio directorship and, by 1939, he was busy making films again, but only official ones. For a few years during World War II, Kalatozov was sent to the U.S. to study Hollywood's production methods. When he returned home in 1945, he was put in charge of Soviet feature film production. This remarkable period of rehabilitation, recovery, and eventual success was achieved at great cost: the loss of his artistic independence. And, like Eisenstein, also accused of formalism, Kalatozov publicly confessed his supposed ideological errors. It was only after Stalin's death that Kalatozov was freed from Soviet strictures, making *The Cranes Are Flying* (1957), *The Unsent Letter* (1959), and his final film, the big-budget *The Red Tent* (1969), with a stellar international cast, which critics hailed as an "anti-epic."

Kalatozov's silent films are the works of a gifted artist made during a time of strict censorship and radical experimentation. Seen today, these films could appear as simply outmoded. Seen through the lens of history, they are still revolutionary. Constructivist filmmakers believed that through cinema the very structures of perception and cognition could be reorganized. It was a new canvas for imagining a better world. Despite all his difficulties and compromises, Kalatozov made all his silent films with this aspiration.

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The famous Soviet comedy *Chess Fever*, about a man obsessed with the game, is a model of the principle of "creative geography" formulated by director Lev Kuleshov. Produced by Pudovkin, a student of Kuleshov's in the 1920s, *Chess Fever* combines staged scenes with documentary footage of the celebrated Cuban champion José Capablanca at a Moscow chess tournament in 1925. Pudovkin edited the film based on conventions of continuity that Kuleshov was among the first to understand—that shots of unrelated people, settings, and actions can constitute a new reality that exist only on film. Look for brief flashes of U.S. champion Frank Marshall and Mexican grandmaster Carlos Torre Repetto as well as appearances by Soviet directors Boris Barnet as the thief and Yakov Protazanov as the chemist.

—Ronald Levaco



The chess-obsessed hero and his fiancée

Ronald Levaco is an award-winning documentary filmmaker, professor emeritus of cinema at San Francisco State University, and editor and translator of Kuleshov on Film *(1975).*



HE WHO GETS SLAPPED

Live Accompaniment by the Matti Bye Ensemble

CAST: Lon Chaney (Paul Beaumont/"He Who Gets Slapped"), Norma Shearer (Consuelo), John Gilbert (Bezano), Ruth King (Maria Beaumont), Marc McDermott (Baron Regnard), Ford Sterling (Tricaud), Tully Marshall (Count Mancini) PRODUCTION: Metro Goldwyn Mayer 1924 PRODUCER: Irving Thalberg DIRECTOR: Victor Seastrom SCENARIO: Carey Wilson and Victor Seastrom, based on the play by Leonid Andreyev SETTINGS: Cedric Gibbons COSTUMES: Sophie Wachner PHOTOGRAPHY: Milton Moore EDITOR: Hugh Wynn PRINT SOURCE: George Eastman House

Seeking a change of pace from his already successful career as a Swedish director and actor, Victor Sjöström arrived in New York in January 1923 at the invitation of Goldwyn Pictures. Sjöström's intention was to study American production methods and to involve himself in a film or two. The Swede never thought to stay in America for very long.

By the spring of 1924, however, when notable actors, directors, and producers gathered for a celebration of the merger of Goldwyn with the Metro and Mayer companies, Sjöström was in the thick of things. By then, he had anglicized his name to Seastrom and had directed *Name the Man* (1924), a popular and critically acclaimed film for Goldwyn. Admired by newly appointed MGM production head Irving Thalberg, Seastrom was chosen to direct the new company's first film—a prestige production on which the studio's fortunes rode. That film was *He Who Gets Slapped.*

Leonid Andreyev's celebrated play, the basis for the script, was the last dramatic work by the celebrated Russian author whose stories had turned increasingly pessimistic. First published in 1914, the play had its premiere in the United States in 1922 at New York's Garrick Theater,

where it enjoyed a six-month run and was widely reviewed. Alexander Woollcott, a founding member of the Algonquin Round Table wrote, "It has things in it that belong to the theater of all the world."

As an acclaimed European director at work in America, Seastrom (like Murnau and Lubitsch) enjoyed contractual privileges not usually granted to studio directors, including script approval, choice of cast, selection of cameraman and assistant director, and the right to supervise editing. Attentive to every facet of a film, Seastrom carefully considered the stories offered to him. Andreyev's symbolic work, with its existential themes, no doubt appealed to the émigré director.



New studio, rising stars: Shearer and Gilbert with Chaney

He Who Gets Slapped is the story of a scientist whose happiness is destroyed by a friend who steals not only his wife but also the results of his life's research. The scientist turns bitter and, in desperation, joins a circus as a clown whose popular act is based on being repeatedly slapped. The clown, now known only as "He" (even his identity has been taken), is slapped whenever he attempts to speak and, with each slap, relives his personal and professional humiliation. Eventually, the clown finds redemption when he falls in love with another circus performer, a pretty young bareback rider named Consuelo.

Lon Chaney, a great success as a pathetic character in a previous Thalberg production, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1923), was given the lead role as the disillusioned, masochistic clown. As with the hunchback, it was a choice role in a famous story. Canadian-born Norma Shearer, then an emerging actress, played the bareback rider. The role helped make her a star. John Gilbert, also on the brink of stardom, at first refused his part, thinking his role too small. In a recent interview, Leatrice Gilbert Fountain, the actor's daughter and biographer, said, "I heard about Jack's reluctance to play the role from several people. I believe the first was his friend Carey Wilson, who adapted the story for the film. He quoted Irving Thalberg to me, 'Jack, that part will do more for your career than anything you have done so far.' *He Who Gets Slapped* was a quality movie. Jack's part was small, but he glittered brightly in it and it did indeed move his career forward."

The supporting cast is likewise notable. Ford Sterling, one of the original Keystone Cops, plays Tricaud, a fellow clown, while veteran actors Tully Marshall and Marc McDermott each give memorable characterizations as the unsavory and scheming count and baron, respectively. Bela Lugosi, then a recent émigré from Hungary, is often said to have had an uncredited role as another clown, but no evidence has surfaced to support or refute the claim.

Thalberg supervised the production but interfered little with Seastrom's work. The director once said in an interview, "It was like making a picture back home in Sweden. I wrote the script without any interference, and actual shooting went quickly and without complications."

He Who Gets Slapped was in production between June 17 and July 28, 1924. It ran seven reels and, according to its copyright registration, featured amber-tinted sequences. *He Who Gets Slapped* was the first production of the newly formed MGM, but not its first release. The film was held back to benefit by a holiday release, opening on November 3, 1924, at the Capitol Theatre in New York City. MGM promoted its first release vigorously, if somewhat inaccurately, with a campaign that billed the film as a "big production of circus life." The film set a one-day world record with $15,000 in ticket sales, a one-week record of $71,900, and a two-week record of $121,574.

"SO BEAUTIFULLY TOLD, SO FLAWLESSLY DIRECTED..."

In its review, the *New York Times* described the film as "... a picture which defies one to write about it without indulging in superlatives ... so beautifully told, so flawlessly directed that we imagine it will be held up as a model by all producers." One fan magazine, *Movie Weekly*, went further: "Occasionally an exceptional picture comes along which makes no attempt to pander to the box office. *He Who Gets Slapped* is one of this sort, an artistic masterpiece."

The success the film enjoyed in New York was repeated throughout the country. When it opened in San Francisco, critics were just as enthusiastic. The *San Francisco Call and Post* headlined its review by calling the film a "truly great photoplay," while the critic for the *San Francisco Examiner* wrote, "[the film] must be classed among the very best of the truly dramatic pictures." It was chosen as one of the top ten movies of the year by the *Boston Post*, *New York News*, *New York Times*, and *Los Angeles Times*, as well as *Photoplay*, *Cine Mundial*, *Movie Monthly*, and *Motion Picture* magazine.

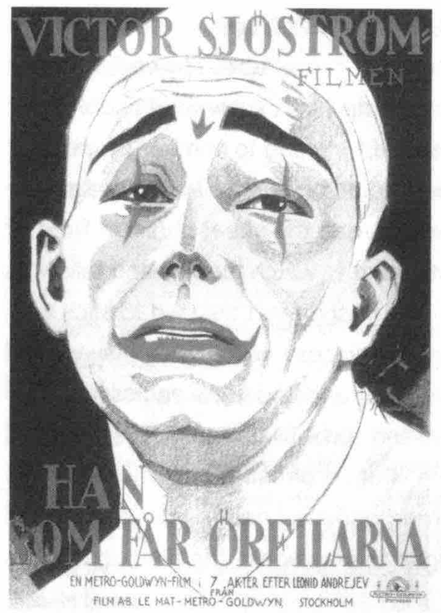
Seastrom's seven years in the United States were productive and resulted in eight other highly regarded works, including *The Scarlet Letter* (1926) and *The Wind* (1928), both with Lillian Gish, as well as the now-lost Greta Garbo film *The Divine Woman* (1928).

With the coming of sound, however, Seastrom's career began to falter. The director, feeling out of synch with the quickly changing industry, decided to return home. He directed only a few more films and, for the next 15 years, continued to act both in movies and on the Swedish stage. At age 78, Seastrom—once again Sjöström—gave his final and probably best remembered performance as the elderly professor in Ingmar Bergman's *Wild Strawberries* (1957).

Today, some silent films are remembered for their historical importance, some for their artistic value, and still others because a particular actor or director played a role in their creation. *He Who Gets Slapped*, a singular and even profound work, possesses each of these cinematic virtues. It stands as one of the great films of the silent era.

–Thomas Gladysz

Thomas Gladysz is an arts journalist and, since 1995, director of the Louise Brooks Society. In 2010, he edited the "Louise Brooks edition" of The Diary of a Lost Girl.



VARIATIONS ON A THEME

MATTI BYE, SOUNDSCAPE ARTIST



Adapted from Bye's presentation on silent film music given in April as part of his Silent Film Festival-sponsored residency at the Headlands Center for the Arts in Marin

I had two big passions when I was a boy in Stockholm—music and film. Every day I practiced classical piano and, in the evenings, I went to screenings at the city's cinematheque.

One day in 1989, a member of the staff asked me if I could accompany a silent film at an upcoming screening of Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin*. She had seen me there watching movies almost every night and knew I played the piano. I, of course, said yes. When the night arrived, I brought some classical sheet music I thought suited the film. When the film started, I played for five minutes and then began to panic, as the piece I was playing was about to end. It was a horrifying moment; I didn't know what to do. When the piece ended, I jumped to another piece I had brought, but it didn't feel true to the images on screen. I had to read the sheet music in front of me, so it was hard to watch the film and follow its progress. I was desperate. I decided to stick with chords from the pieces I had already played. So I picked three and repeated them endlessly, occasionally inserting some simple melody. If I stopped playing, the silence became spooky, the film's images turned ghostly. I had to play something! When I began to play again, the film came back to life.

As a classical pianist I had never improvised before, so this was a completely new experience for me. In hindsight, I couldn't have agreed to play for a more difficult film. *Battleship Potemkin* is challenging for any musician. Eisenstein's editing is so extreme and the visual storytelling is rapid fire. Since that first scary night, I have continued to play for silent films. Nowadays, I write complete scores for contemporary films as well as music for piano and ensemble accompaniment for silent films.

I wrote my first ensemble score for Victor Sjöström's *Phantom Carriage*. The music was very simple, but the approach was unusual. To prepare for the performance, I practiced a kind of method acting with the musicians. I wanted these wonderful musicians to interact with the film during the performance, to respond to the drama in front of us, and to feel with the characters in the story.

I made two simple rules: all eyes must be on the screen and the dynamics of the film must be followed as closely as possible. If you follow a film in this way, the film and the score become one. This method was a new way for the musicians to work. They had to think like actors and play with empathy for the characters.

In my experience, making music for silent film and contemporary film is not that different. There is by necessity a lot more music, as a silent has no talking or ambient sounds. The directors, too, of silent films are usually dead and have left little behind in the way of instruction about the music for their films. The biggest difference, however, is that it's performed live.

Accompanying silent film is a developing art form, even today, one very much alive at the San Francisco Silent Film Festival. And as an art form, it changes over time. There is a wide gap between strict traditionalists—who accompany silents with music only from the era—and those who use the film almost as a backdrop for a concert, accompanying without paying attention to the film and the story. For me, the most important things when playing for a silent are to take the film seriously and to have a passion for silent cinema. As an ensemble playing for a silent, we want nothing less than to erase the time gap between our era and the silent era—to make these beautiful moving images rise out of the past and come alive in front of us.

WE WANT NOTHING LESS THAN TO ERASE THE TIME GAP BETWEEN OUR ERA AND THE SILENT ERA.

When I started composing music for films I used a lot of notes, creating a very dense accompaniment. Now I'm more interested in seeing how little music is needed, how I can use silence as a musical component. If I can bring as little music as possible to the pictures, the audience can bring their own thoughts and feelings to the images.

Subtle changes in the mood of the music bring attention to the sometimes invisible psychological layers in the story. The music can reveal more than the eye can see: imaginary landscapes for the audience to travel within—no detailed road map but a guide, a way to awaken emotions and states of mind.

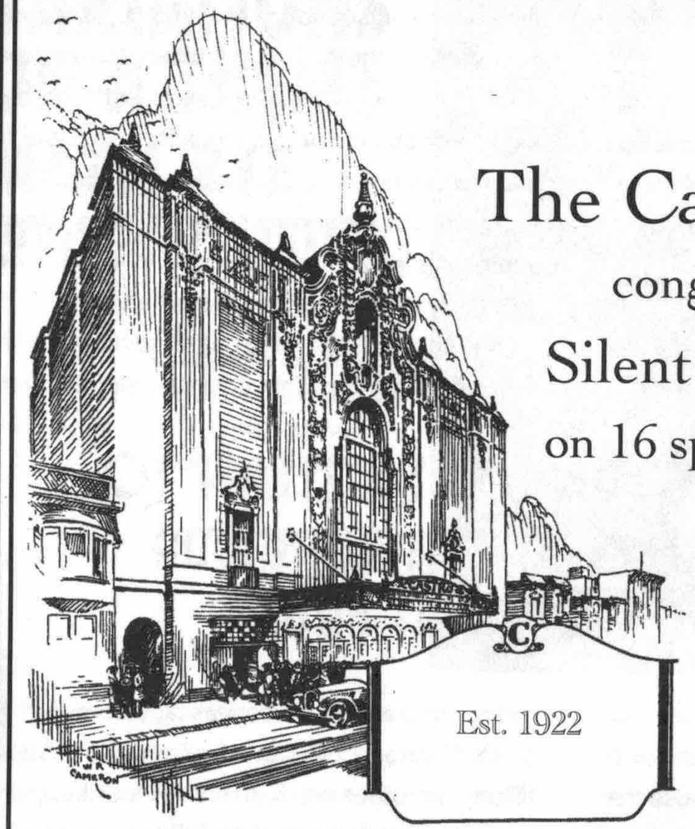
The Ensemble works with different layers in the music and sound for silent films. "You don't have to hear the door close when you see the door close," as René Clair said, defining his asynchronous music for films. It is possible to make a sound other than a door slam and still elicit emotion. Subjective sound can also add an interesting layer, when the sound in the film mirrors the sound in the character's head.

My approach to silent film music has also evolved. Right now, I'm very interested in combining the piano with a soundscape derived from small electronic devices, like transistor radios, filters, and other low-fi objects. A lot of objects around us have sound possibilities that can be very effective and poetic in film. I'm constantly looking for new-sounding objects like a toy banjo I recently found at the Alameda Flea Market. The object is not only what it is meant to be but also its possibility, as in *musique concrète*.

The Matti Bye Ensemble has been together for years and we work very intuitively together. Kristian Holmgren and I start out watching the film over and over and analyzing it. And we trust one another when we play live. If any of us miss something going on in the film, the others will instantly be there.

–Matti Bye

The Matti Bye Ensemble plays at this year's festival for *The Great White Silence*, *The Blizzard*, and *He Who Gets Slapped*. You can hear more about his and the Ensemble's approach to music at the Variations on a Theme program moderated by musician/composer Jill Tracy. The program also features members of the Mont Alto Motion Picture Orchestra and Alloy Orchestra, as well as Dennis James, Giovanni Spinelli, Stephen Horne, and Donald Sosin.



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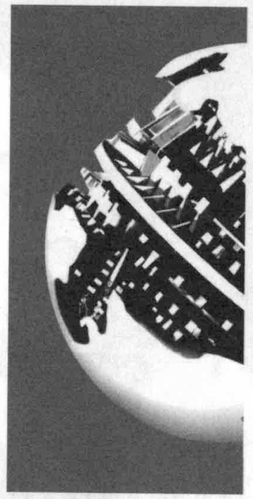
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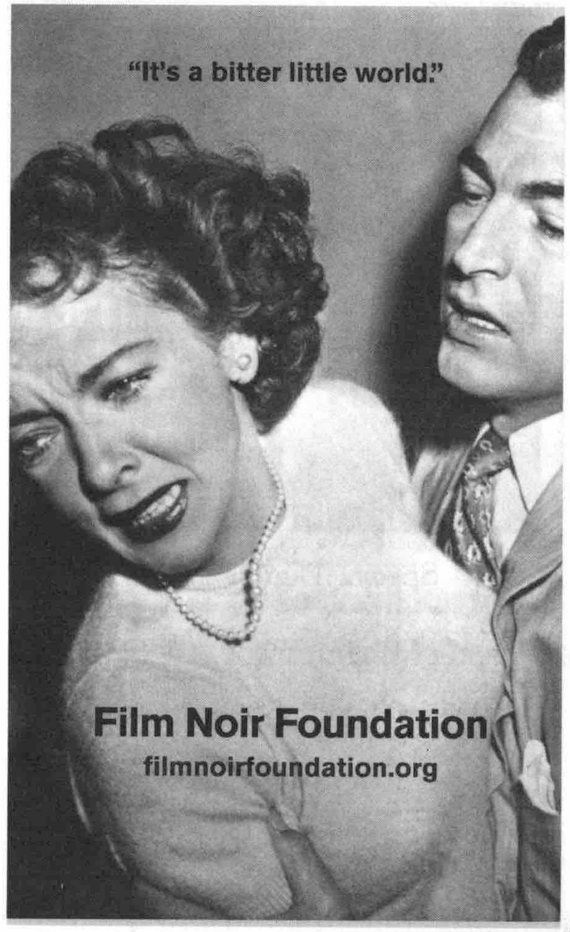
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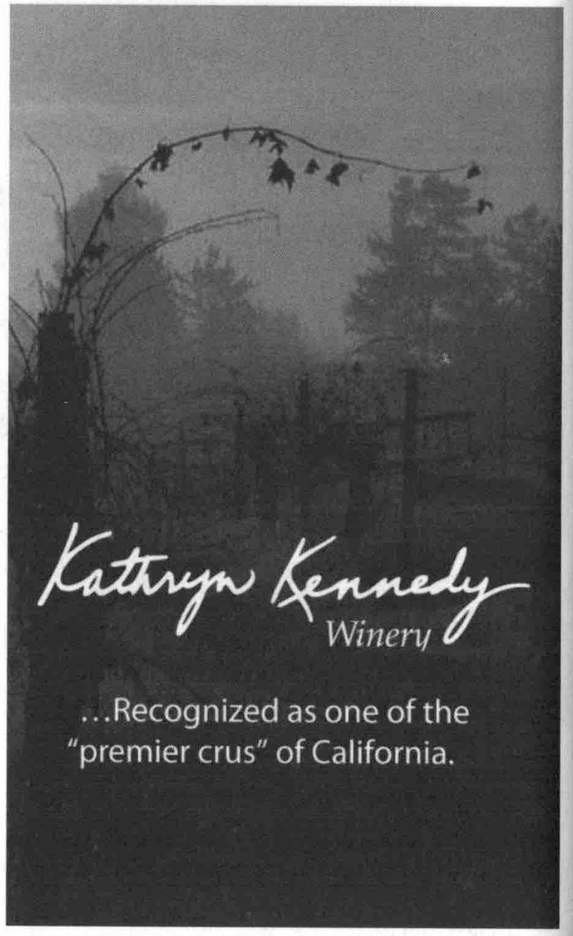
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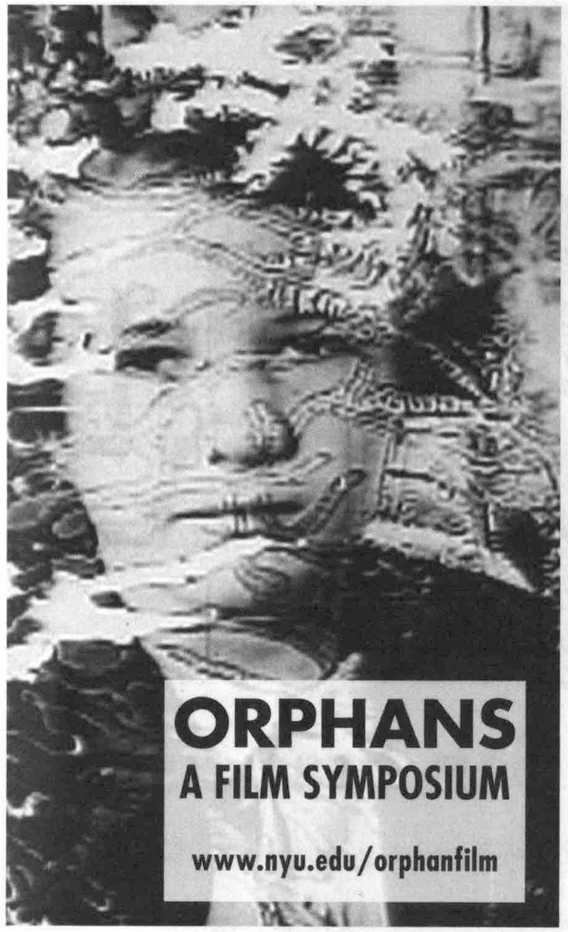
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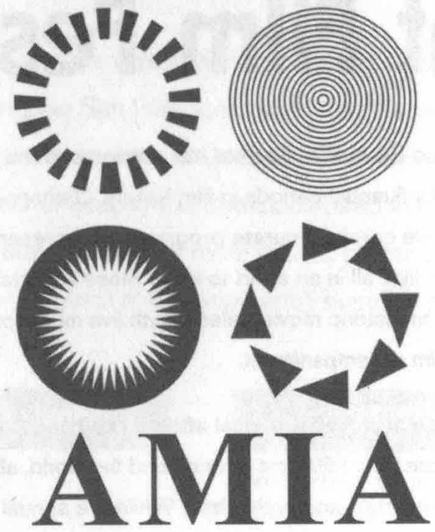
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About The San Francisco Silent Film Festival

For 16 years, the San Francisco Silent Film Festival has showcased the finest films of the silent era, one of the most innovative and influential periods in film history. Gathering rare and classic titles from the world's leading archives, we carefully curate programs to represent the artistry, diversity, and enduring cultural value of silent film, all in an effort to show these important films as they are meant to be seen: on the big screen of an historic movie palace, with live music composed and performed by artists accomplished in silent film accompaniment.

Since the organization's first event in 1994, annual attendance has grown from 1,000 to just over 18,000. We have presented more than 150 films from around the world, all featuring live performances by solo pianists, organists, ensembles, and orchestras. While the annual festival in July remains our flagship event, we now produce programs of film and live music throughout the year.

We also offer educational programs that give audiences background, context, and insight into all that goes into sharing silent movies with a contemporary audience. Leading archivists take the stage for Amazing Tales from the Archives to tell first-hand about the technical–and detective–work involved in bringing lost films and missing footage back to the screen. Variations on a Theme gathers silent-film composers together to talk about the complex–and strikingly diverse–approaches to creating the music that is so essential to silent film exhibition.

We now provide direct support to artists, archivists, and technical professionals working with silent film and music. This year's Douglas Fairbanks restoration, *Mr. Fix-It*, was financed, in part, by our preservation fund, and completed with the assistance of 2010 SF Silent Film Festival Preservation Fellow, Ken Fox. Three of this year's programs–*The Great White Silence*, *The Blizzard*, and *He Who Gets Slapped*–feature musical scores commissioned by the SFSFF in partnership with Headlands Center for the Arts and composed by Matti Bye and Kristian Holmgren during a special collaboration between our two organizations: an artist residency for composers of new music for silent film.

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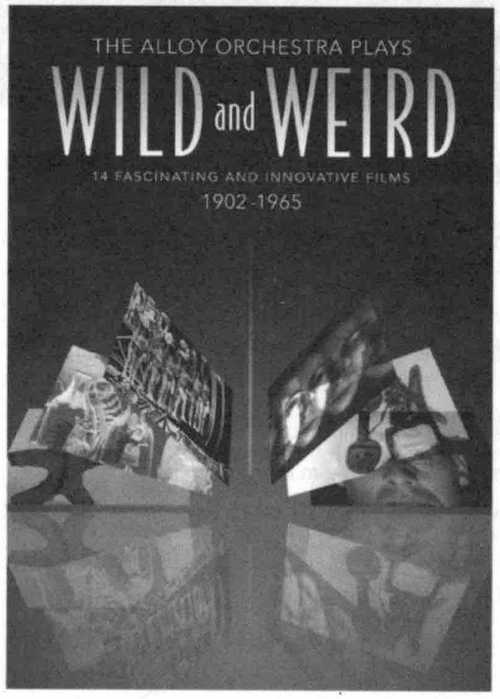
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Michael Ahrens, Ben Armington, Andrew Bacon, Tom Baione, Schawn Belston, Elena Beltrami, Holly Blake, Daniel Bish, Denis Bisson, Buck Bito, Graeme Blackmore, Brian Block, Stephanie Boris, Dorothy Bradley, Serge Bromberg, Kevin Brownlow, Desiree Buford, Kristina Bunger, Frank Buxton, Rob Byrne, Marc Capelle, Ralph Carney, Stefania Carta, Sarah Cathers, Lawrence Chadbourne, Melissa Chittick, Brian Collette, Mark Cooper, Jen Cox, Larry Cronander, Julia Damir, Anita Daly, Francesco d'Ippolito, Mario Diaz, Brian Dilg, Bryony Dixon, Pete Docter, Dennis Doros, Maxine Ducey, Susan Duncan, Nino Dzandzava, Margrit Eichler, Sabine Erlenwein, Jesse Hawthorne Ficks, Sarah Finklea, Eric Fountain, Ken Fox, Peter Fowler, Patrizia Gambarotta, Joe Gardner, Vanessa Gates, Nigel Gilchrest, Robert Gitt, Luca Giuliani, Thomas Gladysz, Tracey Goessel, Bruce Goldstein, Stephen Gong, Dulcinea Gonzalez, Paula Granger, Carter Gunn, Randy Haberkamp, May Haduong, John Henry, Richard Hildreth, Steven Hill, Gary Hobish, Edward Hosey, Joe Hunsberger, Ken Irish, Kathy Jacobson, Dana Jae, Ruggy Joesten, Mark Johnson, Brian Karl, J.B. Kaufman, Liz Keim, Rob Kerwin, Sean Kilcoyne, Jeremy Kinsman, David Kizirian, Sabrina Kovatsch, Edith Kramer, Marleen Labijt, Karen Larsen, Eric Liknaitzky, Peter Limberg, Joe Lindner, Tom Luddy, Guy Maddin, Sharon Maidenberg, Leonard Maltin, Riley Manlapaz, Mascall, Mike Mashon, Jeff Masino, Jim Mayock, Kate McNally, Annette Melville, Russell Merritt, Gary Meyer, Jennifer Miko, Peter Moore, Ed Moya, Eddie Muller, Don Nasser, Carel Nelwan, Robin Newman, Sousxie Oki, Emily Ostereicher, Jamie Owen, Susan Oxtoby, David Packard, Gary Palmucci, Margaret Parsons, Christy Pascoe, Alexander Payne, Erik Pearson, Gemma Perretta, Steve Polta, Megan Prelinger, Rick Prelinger, Ulla Reilly, Elif Rongen-Kaynakçi, Anjelica Rufus, Katerina Sagerstrom, Stephen Salmons, Lucky Sanabria, Jason Sanders, Andreina Sarale, Oran Scott, Olivia Sears, Samuel Sharkey, Judy and Wylie Sheldon, David Shepard, Darla Snodgrass, Todd Sotkiewicz, John Spear, Brian Springer, Patrick Stanbury, Robert Stone, Ed Stratmann, Dan Streible, Aidan Ali-Sullivan, Seiko Takada, Mary Tallungan, Tamara Tatishvili, Elizabeth Tone, Jill Tracy, Donna Tuggle, Paolo Cherchi Usai, David Vashadze, Diana Weech, Jon Wengström, Christine Whitehouse, Todd Wiener, Chris Wiggum, Nancy Wisnia, Joseph Yranski, Valerie York, Terry Zwigoff



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BOOK SIGNINGS

on the Mezzanine...

THURSDAY JULY 14

8:30pm **Julie Lindow** *Left in the Dark: Portraits of San Francisco Theaters*

FRIDAY JULY 15

3:15pm **William Wellman, Jr.** *The Man and His Wings: William A. Wellman and the Making of the First Best Picture*

6:00pm **Richie Meyer** *Ruan Ling-Yu: The Goddess of Shanghai* (DVD)

8:45pm **William Wellman, Jr.** *The Man and His Wings: William A. Wellman and the Making of the First Best Picture*

SATURDAY JULY 16

11:15am **Leonard Maltin** *will sign his books*

J.B. Kaufman and Russell Merritt will sign their sign their Disney-related books

1:30pm **Festival Musicians** sign their CDs and DVDs

3:15pm **Thomas Gladysz** *The Diary of a Lost Girl (Louise Brooks edition)*

5:25pm **Mary Malory** *Hollywoodland*

Karie Bible *Location Filming in Los Angeles*

SUNDAY JULY 17

11:30am **Kevin Brownlow** *The Parade's Gone By*

1:00pm **John Bengtson** *Silent Visions: Discovering Early Hollywood and New York Through the Films of Harold Lloyd*

3:20pm **David Shepard, Jeffrey Masino, Alloy Orchestra**
Wild and Weird: Short Film Favorites with New Music (DVD)

6:00pm **Julie Lindow** *Left in the Dark: Portraits of San Francisco Theaters*

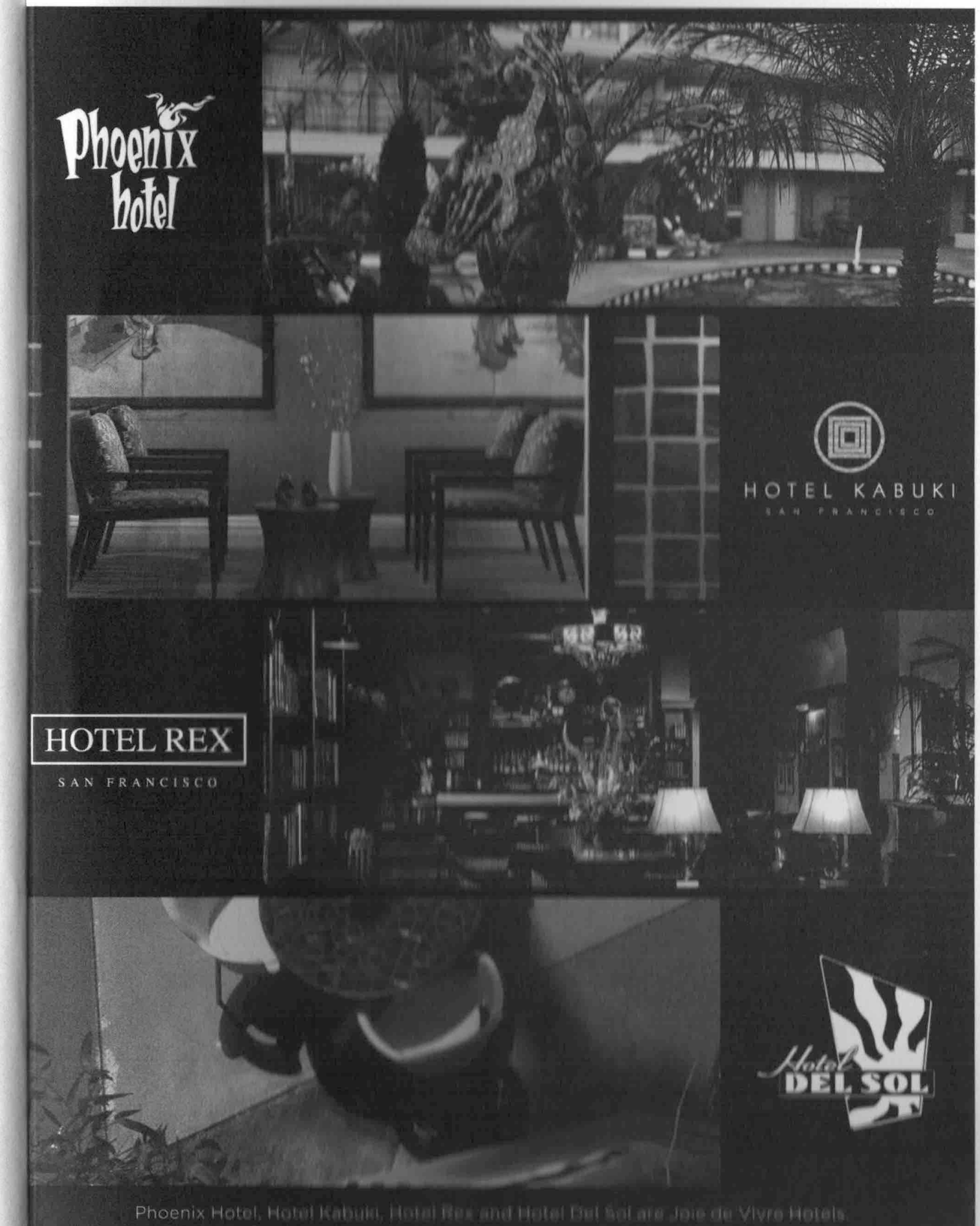
The book and DVD signings have been organized by Thomas Gladysz.

Special thanks to Books Inc., and the participating authors.

All signings follow screenings, and the times above are approximate.

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