

SAN FRANCISCO
SILENT
FILM FESTIVAL



25TH ANNIVERSARY
MAY 5-11, 2022 CASTRO THEATRE

Keiko Kimura



25 YEARS!

Back in the early 1990s when the San Francisco Silent Film Festival was still just an idea germinating, there was only one other silent film festival in the world. At the same time, the city of San Francisco hosted a film festival practically every month. How, the founders, Melissa Chittick and Stephen Salmons, thought, do we break through with these obscure films in an already crowded field? They answered that question in the best way possible: honor the art of silent cinema by screening the finest available prints, at the correct speeds, with live music tailored for each film, at the most fitting venue in the city, the Castro's Art Deco movie palace. They began small in scope and big in spirit by copresenting a screening of the jubilant Ernst Lubitsch satire *I Don't Want to Be a Man* at the Frameline Lesbian and Gay Film Festival in 1994, accompanied by David Hegarty on the Mighty Wurlitzer. Two years and a lot of sweat and blood later, the inaugural festival showed three films over the course of one day and then quickly expanded into a two-day event with eight to ten films over a July weekend. Twenty-five festivals on, SFSFF has grown into a week of jammed-packed days and nights of silent-era cinema, presenting restored classics and dazzling new discoveries culled from archives all around the world with accompaniment by the top musicians in the field. This growth has been fueled, of course, by an international effort of scholars, archivists, preservationists, collectors, exhibitors, and distributors who not only salvage but also secure the future of this timeless art form—an effort for which SFSFF has proudly played its part.

It's our silver jubilee! Enjoy the festival!

THURSDAY MAY 5

7:00 PM FOOLISH WIVES

Music by Timothy Brock conducting the SF Conservatory of Music Orchestra
☛ SFSFF Award presentation

FRIDAY MAY 6

11:00 AM AMAZING TALES FROM THE ARCHIVES

Presenters: Heather Linville, Martin Koerber, Julia Wallmüller, and Kathy Rose O'Regan
Music by Guenter Buchwald

2:30 PM BELOW THE SURFACE

Music by Philip Carli

4:45 PM THE PRIMROSE PATH

Music by Wayne Barker

7:00 PM BLIND HUSBANDS

Music by Mont Alto Motion Picture Orchestra

9:20 PM WAXWORKS

Music by Guenter Buchwald and Frank Bockius

SATURDAY MAY 7

11:00 AM KING OF THE CIRCUS

Music by Philip Carli

1:00 PM THE GREAT VICTORIAN MOVING PICTURE SHOW

Narrated by Bryony Dixon
Music by Stephen Horne and Frank Bockius

3:00 PM STEAMBOAT BILL, JR.

Music by Mont Alto Motion Picture Orchestra

5:00 PM APART FROM YOU

Music by Guenter Buchwald

7:00 PM REBIRTH OF A NATION

Music by DJ Spooky and Classical Revolution with Guenter Buchwald

9:20 PM SALOMÈ

Music by the Matti Bye Ensemble

SUNDAY MAY 8

11:00 AM PENROD AND SAM

Music by Donald Sosin and Frank Bockius
Plus: **THE KID REPORTER**
Music by William Lewis

1:30 PM PREM SANYAS

Music by Club Foot Hindustani featuring Pandit Krishna Bhatt

4:30 PM ARREST WARRANT

Music by the Sascha Jacobsen Quintet

7:00 PM SYLVESTER

Music by Timothy Brock conducting the SF Silent Movie Orchestra
☛ SFSFF Award presentation

9:00 PM A TRIP TO MARS

Music by Wayne Barker

MONDAY MAY 9

12:00 NOON SKINNER'S DRESS SUIT

Music by Philip Carli

2:00 PM THE FIRE BRIGADE

Music by Stephen Horne and Frank Bockius

4:15 PM LIMITE

Music by the Matti Bye Ensemble

7:00 PM DANS LA NUIT

Music by Stephen Horne

TUESDAY MAY 10

12:00 NOON A SISTER OF SIX

Music by Guenter Buchwald and Frank Bockius

2:30 PM THE STREET OF FORGOTTEN MEN

Music by Donald Sosin

4:30 PM THE HISTORY OF THE CIVIL WAR

Music by Anvil Orchestra

7:00 PM THE HUNCHBACK OF NOTRE DAME

Music by Mont Alto Motion Picture Orchestra

WEDNESDAY MAY 11

12:00 NOON SMOULDERING FIRES

Music by Stephen Horne

2:15 PM SALT FOR SVANETIA

Plus: **10 MINUTES IN THE MORNING**
Music by the Matti Bye Ensemble

4:30 PM DIVINE VOYAGE

Music by Guenter Buchwald and Frank Bockius

7:00 PM LADY WINDERMERE'S FAN

Music by Mont Alto Motion Picture Orchestra

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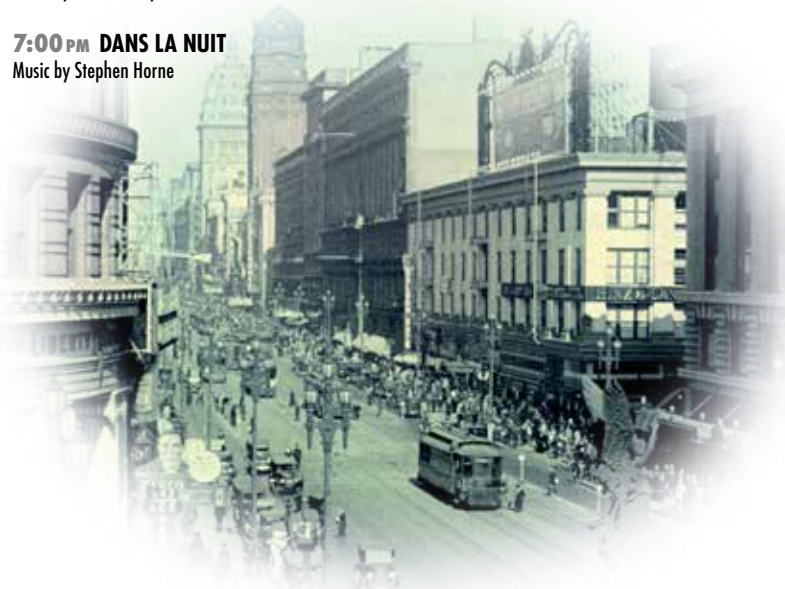
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MUSICIANS

As **ANVIL ORCHESTRA**, Terry Donahue and Roger Clark Miller transform the silent film viewing experience with their big percussive sound. Formerly of the famed Alloy Orchestra, Donahue (drums, percussion, and accordion) and Miller (keyboard/synthesizer) continue the famed orchestra's tradition of innovative scores. Read more about Anvil's sound on page 126.

WAYNE BARKER has garnered acclaim both for his original compositions and live performances in the theater, most notably a Tony nomination for best original score on *Peter and the Starcatcher*. His numerous credits include piano scores for Beth Henley's *Laugh* and Joe DiPietro's *Hollywood*.

Versatile jazz percussionist **FRANK BOCKIUS** specializes in jazz and is versed in medieval, flamenco, and Latin music styles. He has performed for dance and theater companies, in his own bands *Whisper Hot* and *Timpanicks*, and for silent films around the world.

As a specialist in orchestral music from the 1920s and 1930s, conductor and composer **TIMOTHY BROCK** has been responsible for the restoration of landmark silent-era scores, including thirteen penned by Charlie Chaplin. A prolific composer of original music as well, he premieres his new score for *Foolish Wives* on opening night. For *Sylvester* he prepared a reduced version of Karl Pringsheim's original score. Brock will conduct both performances.

AT THE FESTIVAL

Conductor, composer, pianist, and violinist **GUENTER BUCHWALD** is a pioneer of the renaissance in silent film music. With a repertoire of more than three thousand titles, he has conducted orchestras worldwide and is musical director for the silent film presentations at the Slapstick Festival in Bristol, England.

Pianist and scholar **PHILIP CARLI** brings his prodigious musical talent and a committed scholarly outlook to his silent-film accompaniments drawn from the music of the turn of the last century. He has played solo or with an orchestra at venues ranging from Lincoln Center to the Pordenone Silent Film Festival and is the staff accompanist for George Eastman Museum in Rochester, New York.

Richard Marriott and Krishna Bhatt formed **CLUB FOOT HINDUSTANI** to perform their concerto for sitar and ensemble as the accompaniment to *Prem Sanyas*. Drawing musicians from SF's Club Foot Orchestra, a group which has composed and performed for silent films since 1987, players include Pandit Krishna Bhatt, Michael Lewis, Beth Custer, Alisa Rose, Jessica Ivry, and Richard Marriott who also conducts.

DJ SPOOKY (Paul D. Miller) has an affinity for silent films and has written original scores for numerous titles. For *Rebirth of a Nation* he is joined by Guenter Buchwald and **CLASSICAL REVOLUTION**, an ensemble of classically trained musicians led by violist Charith Premawardhana that includes Anthony Blea, Joey Chang, and Sascha Jacobsen.

Based at London's BFI Southbank, **STEPHEN HORNE** is considered one of the leading silent film accompanists working today and both his live and recorded performances have met with acclaim worldwide. Principally a pianist, he often incorporates other instruments into his performances, sometimes playing them simultaneously.

THE SASCHA JACOBSEN QUINTET is led by composer/bassist Sascha Jacobsen who draws on a variety of musical styles from classical to jazz and Argentine Tango. He has played with musicians as varied as

Kronos Quartet, Rita Moreno, and Randy Newman, and for the quintet is joined by Michele Walther, Sheldon Brown, Seth Asarnow, and Dylan Garrison.

A classically trained pianist, organist, and composer **WILLIAM LEWIS** is making his SFSFF debut. Mentored by Donald Sosin, he has been writing for silent film since 2014 (at age ten), striving to create both passionate and (mostly) historically appropriate scores.

The **MATTI BYE ENSEMBLE** seeks that magical, emotional alchemy between music and images, playing a host of instruments that include piano, glockenspiel, violin, musical saw, and percussion. It is led by award-winning film composer and the Swedish Film Institute's longtime silent-movie pianist Matti Bye. Joining Bye this year are Helena Espvall and Laura Naukkarinen.

A chamber ensemble that revives the tradition of silent-film orchestras, **MONT ALTO MOTION PICTURE ORCHESTRA** was formed after discovering the music collection used for a 1920s-era movie theater. Mont Alto has recorded and toured widely, playing its vibrant and historically appropriate scores for more than 125 titles. The musicians are Rodney Sauer, Britt Swenson, David Short, Brian Collins, and Dawn Kramer.

Pianist **DONALD SOSIN** has been creating and performing silent film music for fifty years, playing for major festivals, archives, and DVD recordings. He has been resident accompanist at the Film Society of Lincoln Center, the Museum of the Moving Image, and the Brooklyn Academy of Music. His scores are heard regularly on TCM.

Two ensembles were created to perform under the conductor Timothy Brock's baton. **SAN FRANCISCO CONSERVATORY OF MUSIC ORCHESTRA**, composed of students of the world-class conservatory, will accompany *Foolish Wives* on opening night. Musicians are listed on page 9. **SAN FRANCISCO SILENT MOVIE ORCHESTRA** was assembled by musician/producer Marc Capelle to accompany *Sylvester*. Musicians are listed on page 81.



FOOLISH WIVES

**MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT BY TIMOTHY BROCK CONDUCTING
THE SAN FRANCISCO CONSERVATORY OF MUSIC ORCHESTRA**

DIRECTED BY ERICH VON STROHEIM, USA, 1922

CAST Erich von Stroheim, Maude George, Mae Busch, Dale Fuller, Cesare Gravina, Patsie Hannon (as Miss Dupont), Rudolph Christians, and Malvina Polo **PRODUCTION** Universal Film Manufacturing Co.

PRINT SOURCE SFSFF Collection

PRECEDED BY SAN FRANCISCO: THE GOLDEN GATE CITY (1925)

A hundred years ago, and for most of a year, Erich von Stroheim commanded *Foolish Wives*, as writer, director, and star. Universal had allotted him \$250,000 as a budget, but the “Von” took that sum as provocation. His previous film, *Blind Husbands*, had been costed at just \$25,000, but he had spent ten times that amount. What the hell—the film turned out a hit. So on *Foolish Wives*, Stroheim began to scatter more than a million dollars. The film was set in Monte Carlo, and he told Universal to build it anew with palaces and plazas on the Californian coast, and make it lavish. (This was Richard Day’s debut as art director. He later won seven Oscars and was part of *Greed*, *Dodsworth*, and *On the Waterfront*.)

It was Stroheim’s first plan to deliver a six-hour picture, to play on consecutive nights. He regarded it as his artistic duty to defy reason and financial modesty. As befitted Monte Carlo, he was a constant gambler and at first that overawed his studio.

Until another man opposed him. Irving Thalberg was as slender and medically problematic as Stroheim was stocky and robust. (These titans were both five feet six.) At the age of twenty, Thalberg had been hired by Carl Laemmle to introduce financial order at Universal. So he warned Stroheim,

about spending too much money on big scenes that had little to do with the tight, sardonic melodrama. He said he might fire the Von, to which Stroheim replied, how can you lose me—I’m the star? Fisticuffs were threatened. “Since when does a child instruct a genius?” demanded Stroheim. So Thalberg confiscated his camera.

The shooting came to a close. *Foolish Wives* proved to be another hit. Whereupon Stroheim strode away to the Goldwyn studio and began to make a picture from the Frank Norris novel *McTeague* that would be called *Greed*. But he took so long over it there was time for a business merger—the formation of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer—and who would he find as his production chief there but Irving.

Instead of his desired six hours, Universal had cut *Foolish Wives* down to 117 minutes. We are showing a newly restored version of 147 minutes (the project of this festival and MoMA in New York), with ravishing hand-tinted color passages, and it’s natural for film festivals to believe in regaining every precious minute. But have a care: I knew one of the few people alive in the late 1980s who had seen Stroheim’s full-length *Greed*. Irene Mayer Selznick had spent a day with the director’s cut. She admired the film enormously,

and understood its daring, but she believed it was absurdly long because Stroheim could not control himself. He had to show everything, and then show it again and again.

So the budgetary splendor of *Foolish Wives*—Universal promoted it as the first million-dollar movie—and the re-creation of a Monte Carlo more Ruritanian than Mediterranean actually distracts us from the incisive intimacy in psychological scenes. But that requires a fuller appreciation of Stroheim and his self-destructive urges.

He had no right to that “von” and its suggestion of aristocracy. Born in 1885, Erich Stroheim was



not Prussian (as he sold himself in Hollywood), but the son of a Viennese hatmaker. He was Jewish, with no advantages, except for the utter conviction that he should pretend to be tall, all-conquering, and a genius. He may be the first great trickster in American film (though the field is crowded with such upstarts).

He came to America in 1909 and not enough is known about him for several years, until he turned up in Hollywood and offered himself for what you might call “Hun” parts—cruel, arrogant officers to match the stereotype that Germany after 1914 was a very bad thing. He had the extra insight to announce his expertise on military uniforms so that he would also be employed to advise on costume. This was smoke and mirrors: he had never done any military service.

The trick worked, and so in *Foolish Wives* he dominates the screen in a white tunic, crossed belt and medals, boots and breeches, and a military cap worn at a rakish angle to rhyme with the slant of his cigarette holder. Plus, he has a monocle for class.

I say dominates because the Von reveled in his bogus image. He photographs his character with an awe and an erotic suspense that surpasses his eye for women. The film has several female characters but they are variously stupid, pathetic, or vicious. The count exploits them all but then smiles at us as if to say, “Well, wouldn’t you do the same?” He was about to be labeled for eternity, by Universal and the media, as “The man you love to hate.”

Exulting in this fakery, he was a pioneer in understanding how America and Hollywood depended on outrageous

pretending. So he appears to be established in Monte Carlo as “Count Wladislaw Sergius Karamzin,” impeccably uniformed, with two “cousins,” both “princesses,” as entourage. They are actually his former lovers, with criminal records; the trio are desperately on the make, close to going broke. So the count makes a play for Mrs. Hughes,

the twenty-one-year-old wife to the new American envoy to Monte Carlo, a man more than twice her age. (She is played by “Miss Dupont.” That was not her real name; why shouldn’t an actress aspire to class?) This is where you can begin to feel the master arranger in Stroheim and the icy humorist.

The count makes himself evident to Mrs. Hughes on the veranda outside her hotel. He says nothing, but watches her and taps his boot with his stick. She begins to be disconcerted or wooed, and can hardly concentrate on the romance novel she is reading. But Stroheim lets us see that book: it is *Foolish Wives* by Erich von Stroheim! This is as funny and rueful as the moment in *Sunset Blvd.* when we realize that his Max von Mayerling is not just Norma Desmond’s butler, but her ex-husband and constant director.

The very expensive public buildings of Monte Carlo are conventionally impressive, but *Foolish Wives* is most gripping in one-on-one confrontations, where Stroheim filmed watchful faces with an acuity that few matched in 1922. In one scene, the counterfeit count takes Mrs. Hughes for a country outing. Marooned by a storm, they retreat to a humble cottage. The drenched woman needs to change her clothes. The count sits on the other side of the room in a high-backed chair. But then he uses his hand mirror (he’s never without it) to gloat over the woman’s bare back. Not many scenes that early had grasped the intrinsic voyeurism of the medium.

The gloomy self-delight in the bond between Stroheim’s camera and his wolf’s face is a mark of how far ahead of his time he was. There were plenty of villains in films of the early ‘20s, and we were seldom in doubt about what to think of them. So the count is a fraud, a user, a coward, and a suave monster. But what keeps this film alive is the

way we are compromised in watching him. Here is a picture fascinated by a medium that cannot keep a straight or disapproving face for wickedness. The count comes to a bad end in the way of another Viennese charmer, Harry Lime from *The Third Man*. But Stroheim films the count like a rascal passing hours in front of his own mirror. His balancing of love and loathing in our response opened up whole rooms of psychological intrigue, richer than his cardboard Monte Carlo.

— DAVID THOMSON

Before the screening New York’s MoMA will receive the 2022 SFSFF Award for commitment to the preservation and presentation of silent cinema.

SF CONSERVATORY OF MUSIC ORCHESTRA

Sofia Dorante Schutte (Violin I)
Magdalena Zaczek (Violin I)
Aleksi Zaretsky (Violin I)
Archie Brown (Violin I)
Anna Nordmoe (Violin II)
Hanbo Wang (Violin II)
Erika Aoki (Violin II)
James Nelson (Viola)
Paulina Flores (Viola)
Rocio Lopez Sanchez (Cello)
Federico Strand Ramirez (Cello)
Alexandria Kelley (Bass)
Julia Pyke (Flute and Piccolo) - will change
Quinton Smith (Oboe & English Horn)
Caleb Rose (Clarinet and Bass Clarinet)
Shelby Capozzoli (Bassoon)
Elizabeth Dormer (Piano)

A BILLION-DOLLAR CAST

BY MANJONIE CHARLES DRISCOLL

Erich von Stroheim, clad in the bemedaled uniform of His Grace, Count Sergius Karamzin, and with the California sunshine bringing beads of uncouth perspiration to his brow, stood on a bench and waved a megaphone.

"Move, please move!" he shouted. "Show a little life, can't you. You stand around like—a bunch of dead fish!" And many million dollars' worth of extra people, who had never in all their expensive lives been called fish, dead or otherwise, obediently quickened their steps and displayed the required life as they strolled up and down the promenade at Monte Carlo.

It all happened on a certain warm afternoon at Point Lobos on the California Coast, and the "dead fish" were the top bubbles of the cream of San Francisco society, three hundred of them, who had motored down in their own limousines to provide the Monte Carlo crowds for the Universal feature, *Foolish Wives*, and to receive from President Carl Laemmle of Universal a check for five thousand dollars for two San Francisco charities. Allured by the prospect of "getting into the movies," enjoying a unique week-end's entertainment, and garnering a goodly sum for the needs of the Children's Hospital and the Girls' Recreation League, society set aside other engagements, packed its most fashionable afternoon garb, and provided Director Stroheim with almost an embarrassment of riches in the way of crowds.

Foolish Wives is a story that takes place principally at Monte Carlo. Universal City furnished a sufficiently satisfactory location on which to erect the Plaza with the Hotel de Paris, the Casino, and the Café de Paris. But Universal City's resources in the matter of rocky coastline are limited, and Director

Stroheim, stickler for detail that he is, demanded nothing less than a real ocean dashing against real cliffs along the Monte Carlo promenade. Along the cliffs was constructed the Monte Carlo promenade, three hundred and five feet long and sixty feet wide. Above this were the terraces and the Casino; below, the white-walled villa perched on a rocky point. Like its original, the Casino turned its back on the sea. You might stroll through the back door, but if you insisted on coming out at the front door, it meant a journey of some five hundred miles, for the other half of the Casino showing the front view, was built at Universal City, far away in southern California.

The first thing that society learned about "working in the movies" was that it meant getting up early. In the lobby of the Hotel Del Monte, where the extras assembled the night before the big day, stood a businesslike call-board. "Leave hotel at eight-thirty. Be on lot and made up at nine," it said. Despite the late hours of a dinner dance the night before, society heroically got up at sunrise, yawned a little over breakfast, and embarked on the half hour's drive to the location. So did all Monterey, Carmel, Del Monte, and way stations. To accommodate the many business men and women of many social engagements who took part, the scene was taken on Sunday. By the time the most belated extra had arrived, the motor display outside the gates made the ordinary automobile show look like the motor transport division of a two-reel comedy.

Some lucky extras won assignments to the teatable brigade and sat comfortably at the terrace tables where correctly garbed waiters served them with real soft drinks and received real tips. The fortunate ones who might sit down were the envied of those whose lot it was to stroll from one end of

the promenade to the other and back again. "All right," telephoned Stroheim from the camera platform. "All ready!" shouted the assistants. "Walk—keep on walking—don't all go one way—look out, don't get in a bunch!"

Then came the first real test. Close-up shots of the same scene were wanted, and it became necessary for the crowd to hold the pose while the cameras were hastily moved down from the platforms. They did it like veterans, these first-time people. When hands that had been raised to hats when the whistle blew were cautiously lowered to relieve weary muscles the owners of the hands besought their neighbors to help them remember which hand had been up. At the tables, extras sat clutching their glasses and sipped not one forbidden sip. Out of the corners of their eyes they watched the fascinating and mysterious process of setting up cameras, placing reflectors, and getting ready for the next scene, but they obeyed orders and kept still.

For eight good hours the work went on, stopping only for a brief luncheon interval at noon when the basket lunches sent from the hotel vanished in short order under the onslaught of hungry crowds. The principals of *Foolish Wives* were luxuriating in as near to a day off as is likely to happen to principals working under such a busy and energetic director as Stroheim. Maude George in the black draperies of the romantically mysterious Princess Olga Petchnikoff, Marguerite Armstrong, one of the "foolish wives," Mae Busch, Cesare Gravina, and the others were there, taking part in scenes upon



call, but leaving most of the work to the extras. Not until sunset, when the light began to fail, did Director Stroheim finally release his actors.

When for the last time Director Stroheim shouted, "Cut!" the camera men picked up the precious reels. Long before then the audience had remembered that supper time was approaching and had started to drift away. For hours the narrow mountain road between Point Lobos and Del Monte was alive with an unbroken line of automobiles, bumper to tail light for the whole eleven miles. Last of all came Stroheim, tired but refusing to admit it.

"A good day's work," he said. "They all did beautifully. Only I'm sorry we had to stop. I wanted to get such a lot more."

Editor's note: *The San Francisco Chronicle* reported that the "cream of society" included the Joseph Tobins, the Raymond Armsbys, the Max Rothchilds, George Garitt, F.B. Morse, Harry Hunt, Prescott Scot, Clifford Weatherwax, Andrew Welch, Mrs. William Mayo Jr., Mrs. S.S. Hopkins, Mrs. Bernard Ford, and Mrs. Elkins de Guigne.

Condensed from the original published in *Picture-Play* magazine's March 1921 issue.

Screening the Archive

Dave Kehr on MoMA's Cinematic Mission

Interview by Marilyn Ferdinand

TO SAVE AND PROJECT. This could be the mission statement of any number of film-related organizations around the world, but it is the name of a festival that has been mounted for eighteen years by New York City's temple of modernity, the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), one of the recipients of this year's SFSFF's award for commitment to the preservation and exhibition of silent cinema.

It may seem strange to contemplate, but filmmakers are among the most recent of the artists on the contemporary scene, working in a medium that, by comparison to other art forms, is still in its youth. (Even photography predates it by almost a hundred years.) As such, film is a perfect fit for MoMA and the museum recognized its importance fairly early. Iris Barry helped establish MoMA's film library in 1935, acquiring both *Foolish Wives* and *Lady Windermere's Fan* during her tenure. In the 1970s and '80s, MoMA film curator Eileen Bowser expanded the collection by adding what remained of the Fox Film Corporation output, much of which had been destroyed by fire.

MoMA continues this important work today. Curator Dave Kehr, a former film critic for the *Chicago Reader* and the *New York Times*, works on archival preservation and restoration as well as programs series that help put MoMA's rich archive in front of audiences. I talked to Kehr before the pandemic and again earlier this year about its recent restorations and MoMA's overall cinematic mission.

HOW DID THE *FOOLISH WIVES* RESTORATION DEVELOP?

MoMA has the only first-generation U.S. material, a nitrate print that Iris Barry bought from Universal in 1935. Universal had re-edited it, changed the intertitles, changed some of the character's names and professions, and so on to produce a somewhat adulterated version for a reissue in 1928 that never happened.

In the 1970, film academic Arthur Lennig decided he would be able to reconstruct Stroheim's original cut using the notes and shooting script that he and film scholar Richard Koszarski had discovered. That's the version that's been out on Kino.

Then we found some more information—censorship records. It's amazing! A book, which is a French novelization from 1923, that seems to have been written by a guy who was just taking notes off the film. It matches up virtually shot for shot with the stuff that we have, describing

gestures, lines, even the way people walk across the frame. It also contains descriptions of the scenes that were probably cut by Universal a couple of days after the opening in 1922.

I'd been talking about doing a project with Robert Byrne (SFSFF board president) for a while, and this was one that we were both interested in. It was a good chance to return a movie that everyone thinks they know—but they don't. There's no new footage in this. It's just that we've edited for a better understanding of what order the film should be in. It's been tinted, and there are some wonderful pseudo-hand-coloring sequences for the big fire at the end.

I UNDERSTAND MoMA HAS WORKED ON TWO-STRIP COLOR FILMS. WHAT PROGRESS HAVE YOU MADE?

We have been working for years on Douglas Fairbanks's *The Black Pirate* from 1926. It has turned out to be an insanely complicated project. It's the first version of two-color



Technicolor, which has all kinds of technical issues. It's alternating frames on the same strip, so it's not actually two strips; it's two colors, and very hard to work with. You can't believe it ever worked at all, much less as well as it did. We are just now getting results of the color that are satisfying. There are rich red, green, brown, earth tones. There's no blue and no yellow, so it doesn't have a real pop to it. With that limited palette, you get some pretty nice effects. It's going to take another six or eight months, then we'll see what kind of interest there is in it.

MoMA HAS RESTORED A FEW ERNST LUBITSCH FILMS IN THE LAST FEW YEARS. CAN YOU TALK A BIT ABOUT THE LATEST ONE, *LADY WINDERMERE'S FAN*?

This was one of the first films that Iris Barry acquired back in the late 1930s. The contact print was an incredibly sharp and stable image. Short of having an actual negative, it was about as good as you could get. After we did *Rosita* and *Forbidden Paradise*, which required a lot of heavy lifting, it was nice to have one that was fairly straightforward. I think it's just stunning.

We've tinted it following the original formula, and we're working on recording the score as we've done before with the musicologist Gillian Anderson. She has the original cue sheets and is convinced that Lubitsch was closely involved in creating these themes, because they're very sophisticated.

WHEN WE TALKED IN 2020, YOU HAD SAID MoMA WAS KEEN ON DIGITIZATION AND DIGITAL STREAMING. HOW IS THAT GOING?

Virtual Cinema [streaming for members] started when we were completely shut and reception was pretty good. But as soon as we started opening up again,

viewership really fell off. The question is, "Do we want to keep doing it?" I like the opportunity to appeal to an audience beyond New York City, and there are a lot of things in the MoMA collection I'd be happy to share. It's just that, in addition to the expense of digitization, licensing these things turns out to be another nightmare. I wanted to show a couple of Fox films, and it was quite a struggle even finding the right person at Disney to talk to and then arrange to basically license our own stuff. I don't know if we have the work power to do that, and I'm not sure there's support there.

HOW HAS ATTENDANCE BEEN SINCE MoMA REOPENED ITS THEATERS?

Maybe fifty percent of what we had before, which seems about what the commercial theaters are doing as well. To Save and Project came off more or less as normal in January. The audience was down a little bit, but not drastically. Hopefully there will be a nice, steady beat of restorations coming out of MoMA for the next couple of years.



AMAZING TALES FROM THE ARCHIVES

MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT BY GUENTER BUCHWALD

FIERY EFFECTS

Given the choice between losing a film and being able to save it without color, many archives opted for the latter. And a good thing, too, or more of our silent film heritage could have been lost. But that choice resulted in a persistent misconception about the era's films as strictly black-and-white. With the help of today's versatile digital technologies, archivists are correcting that picture by adding the color back in. A spectacular case in point are the fiery effects in *The Fire Brigade*, unseen as it was intended since its initial release and recently restored by the Library of Congress. LOC's Film Laboratory supervisor HEATHER LINVILLE talks about the color processes used to pump up the drama in this MGM nail-biter and shares intriguing stories about the studio's collaboration with the nation's firefighters.

EMOTIONAL CUES

A Gesamtkunstwerk in the truest sense, Lupu Pick's *Sylvester* would still be incomplete if not for the rediscovery of Klaus Pringsheim's original score. Conceived without intertitles, the film also features performances absent any dialogue: the actors communicate with each other only through their body movements and facial expressions, making the music crucial as a kind of emotional map. It is fitting, then, that finding the score among Pringsheim's papers in a Canadian archive proved crucial to the film's reconstruction as well. Deutsche Kinemathek's JULIA WALLMÜLLER, graduate restorer, and MARTIN KOERBER, retiring this year as head of Audiovisual Heritage, discuss how they returned *Sylvester* to as close to its original state as possible.

ACCIDENTAL ANTHROPOLOGIST

In 1925–1926, during the early years of the Irish Free State, American naturalist Benjamin T. Gault spent time in west Kerry and Cork, collecting seabirds and other urban wildlife specimens. By that time filmmaking was a tool for documenting fieldwork, like notetaking, sketching, or photography. As a thorough scientist would, Gault also turned his lens on the wider habitat, capturing the area people as they went about their business, swarming out of church, gathering at the races, even goofing for the camera. Upon his return home, he filed his footage away and it was never seen. A search started by a curious local, Mícheál Ó Mainnín, who'd heard tales of Gault's visit from his grandfather, led to the discovery of nineteen rolls of 35mm nitrate negatives among Gault's fieldnotes at Chicago's Academy of Sciences. Currently under restoration by SFSFF's ROBERT BYRNE and KATHY ROSE O'REGAN, with financial help from the Irish Film Institute, these freshly uncovered films offer a rare glimpse of a way of life ever more remote, but not quite forgotten.



BELOW THE SURFACE

MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT BY PHILIP CARLI

DIRECTED BY IRVIN V. WILLAT, USA, 1920

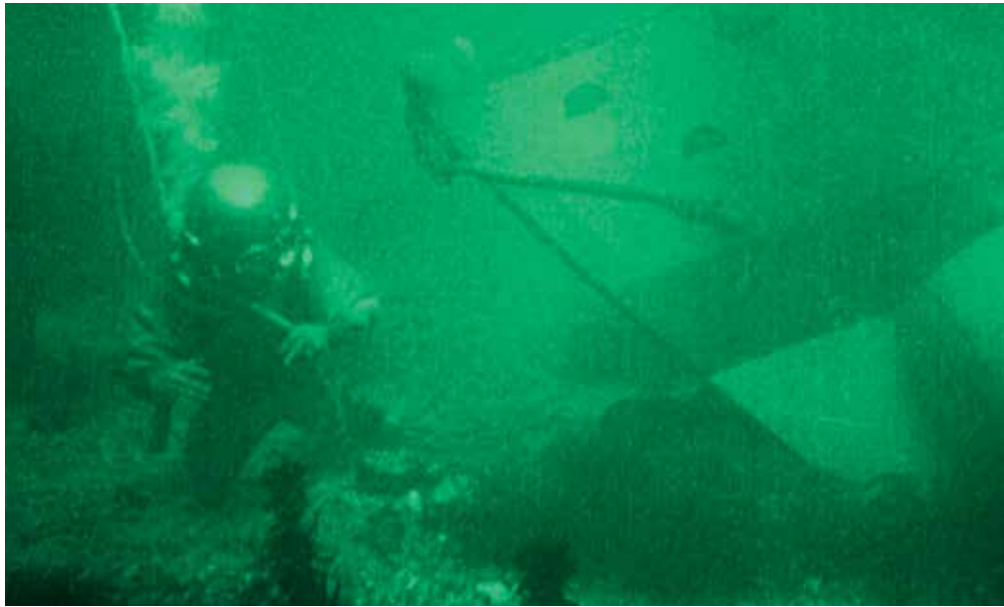
CAST Hobart Bosworth, Lloyd Hughes, Grace Darmond, and George Webb PRODUCTION Thomas H. Ince Productions PRINT SOURCE SFSFF Collection

OF all the restorations spearheaded by the San Francisco Silent Film Festival, is any more shocking than 1919's *Behind the Door*, which screened in 2016? The taxidermist turned World War I Navy captain (Hobart Bosworth) wreaks his vengeance on the German U-boat captain (Wallace Beery) who has led the gang rape and murder of the U.S. captain's wife, ejecting her body out a torpedo tube. "I told him, if I ever caught him, I'd skin him alive - -," says our hero over coffee, his taxidermy knives already put away; "But he died before I finished - - Damn him."

Producer Thomas H. Ince wrote an open letter to exhibitors about his planned follow-up: "In every way *Below the Surface* is superior to *Behind the Door*. The story is strong and not gruesome." As that defensive last word hints, "female audiences" had been warned away by at least one reviewer of *Behind the Door* and Ince was walking a tricky line with this new film, another death-haunted sea adventure set again on coastal Maine, from the same scenarist (Luther Reed), cinematographer (J.O. Taylor), star (Hobart Bosworth), and director (Irvin V. Willat). Both films were promoted as Hobart Bosworth pictures, his name above the titles. "Few motion picture actors are as much at home in stories of the sea than Mr. Bosworth," observed *Motion Picture News* in 1920; "Something of the tang and power of the salt waves seems to have been transmitted to his staunch frame." *Below the*

Surface is a fine illustration of how fully Bosworth could invigorate an otherwise standard story, here playing a sea-hardened diver whose apprentice son is duped by a couple of slick schemers.

If Bosworth's centrality to the first years of feature-length (and Bay Area) moviemaking is forgotten, that's because his most remarkable series of films is almost entirely lost. In 1913, he signed an exclusive contract with Jack London, then America's highest paid and most celebrated writer, to adapt his works to the screen and, by the end of that year, had begun producing them at his new Bosworth, Inc. studio (which still stands—on Occidental Boulevard in Hollywood—and is the country's oldest continually operating movie studio). Of his seven Jack London features, only half of *Martin Eden* (1914) survives, and that was the adaptation the author liked least. Most to be regretted may be the loss of the first, *The Sea Wolf* (1913), at seven reels the longest American film to date, with Bosworth producing, writing the script, directing, and starring as "Wolf" Larsen. London had come down from his Glen Ellen home to Sausalito to watch the staging of the fog-shrouded ferryboat crash that opens the story: "It was the beginning of the picturing of my stuff, and the first time I've ever seen moving pictures made, and I had one of the best times of my life." Also sad is the loss of two 1914 six-reelers, both shot partly in San Francisco: London's autobiographical *John Barleycorn* ("We can almost smell the salt air and hear the murmurs



of the waves," reported *Moving Picture World*) and *The Valley of the Moon*, with its San Francisco teamsters strike, Carmel artist colonies, and Sonoma farmlands.

In *Below the Surface* "Hobart Bosworth, the inimitable"—to adopt *Motion Picture News*' characterization—is at his height as an actor and at age fifty-two still performing his own underwater stunts. At the turn of the century he'd abandoned a stage career to come west as treatment for the tuberculosis that he never fully shook, not that you'd guess it from the physicality of his film performances. He held records for underwater endurance—put to use for the free-dive rescue sequence near the end of this film—having adopted the theory of a Santa Rosa physician that "underwater tests are beneficial to lung sufferers." Bosworth had run away from his naval officer father to go to sea at age twelve. He'd been integral to California's first movie studio when he joined Selig Polyscope in 1909 and, as he put it about the stunt work in his 150-some Selig shorts, "I feel a

particular personal interest in California because I have fallen down most of it, either from the top of a cliff or from a horse."

Bosworth has been accused of overacting, but that is to confuse the wild storylines of so many of his films with his performance style, which is surprisingly restrained, as exemplified in *Below the Surface*. Deep-sea diver "Martin Flint" can, his surname notwithstanding, be teasingly warm with his wife and son, but when Bosworth's shock of gray hair falls over his piercing eagle eyes, the mustachioed schemer had best watch out! This is an old, blue-eyed salt you don't want to cross! Proto-Clint Eastwood, Bosworth understood that he needn't do too much, letting his expressive hands, steady gaze, and the postures of his six-foot-two frame do the work. Adding to the otherworldly threat in Bosworth's glare is the way his light blue eyes registered as almost white on the orthochromatic film stock then in use in Hollywood. By the time of *Captain January* (1924), his eyes appear more natural, thanks to panchromatic stock,

just in time for his series of wealthy father roles, notably in *The Big Parade* (1925), *My Best Girl* (1927), and *A Woman of Affairs* (1928).

Anxious to get this follow-up into theaters, Ince began production on *Below the Surface* the same month—November 1919—that *Behind the Door* wrapped. But by mid-winter, even Southern California proved far from ideal for shooting a sea adventure. Bad weather and churning oceans on location off Catalina Island made most of the first three weeks of footage unusable, and in January 1920 Bosworth had to reshoot his dives in a tank on Ince's new Culver City lot. The Maine fishing island was erected in a Japanese American fishing village just north of Santa Monica, near the old Inceville studio.

"The picture starts with a punch, loses its vitality in the middle, but finishes with a powerful climax," *Motion Picture News* reported, accurately enough. Underwater action bookends a family melodrama centered on the son, played by Lloyd Hughes, who carries his country bumpkin character to annoying extremes. Ince would tirelessly promote Hughes, who is best remembered as the Bolshevik dupe in *Dangerous Hours* (1919) and for work alongside Colleen Moore in *Ella Cinders* (1926) and alongside dinosaurs in *The Lost World* (1925). Here his character conveniently forgets his pie-baking, Pickford-esque girlfriend (Gladys George) and proposes marriage to the vamp (Grace Darmond) less than an hour after meeting her. Skirting new Prohibition laws, she cast her siren spell by demonstrating the correct use of cocktail shakers. It's surely for the best that he takes to bed with "brain fever" for most of the film's final half hour.

Clearly Ince was more promoter than critic in pitching *Below the Surface* as "in every way ... superior to *Behind the Door*." Reviews were mixed.

Photoplay found too much of the film "morbid ... Bosworth is fine, but Ince seems to have erred in judgment in selecting Lloyd Hughes for prospective stardom." The *New York Times* recommended it as "worth seeing, despite the melodramatic meaninglessness of much of its story ... There is a villain in the story, who is too obviously a villain, and a villainess, who is too overtly villainous. Also the hero suffers, as most heroes do, from a lack of common sense ... But there is something telling about Bosworth. He rings true. He is an actor, but never seems to be acting. He has great force, but also restraint, and a personality that is quietly dominant."

Fortunately, the story's conclusion is not entirely predictable. "The father discovers the woman's duplicity and reveals it to the son in a startlingly Bosworthian way," as the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* hinted about the resolution. *Film Daily* threw Ince's word back at him and found this ending again "gruesome." *Behind the Door* had been a box-office hit and *Below the Surface* was even more profitable, costing \$132,000 and grossing \$354,000. Ince knew his audience better than did critics.

Below the Surface now surpasses *Behind the Door* in one other way: the quality of its new SFSFF restoration, which draws almost entirely from the original camera negative. (Among American silent features, little more than one percent survive via negatives, and many of those are incomplete.) This impeccable restoration—with evocative art titles and accurate color tinting—returns the film's crisp visuals to the screen after more than a century and reminds us of all the spectacular original nitrate films still out there waiting

— SCOTT SIMMON



THE PRIMROSE PATH

MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT BY WAYNE BARKER

DIRECTED BY HARRY O. HOYT, USA, 1925

CAST Wallace MacDonald, Clara Bow, Stuart Holmes, Tom Santschi, Pat Moore, Lydia Knott, and Arline Pretty PRODUCTION Embassy Pictures Corporation PRINT SOURCE SFSFF Collection

The *Primrose Path* gives us a blueprint of Jazz Age rendering of cinematic crime. Diamonds are the currency. In its event-packed screenplay, the bosses frame the foot soldiers when the authorities start snooping. There's a hierarchy of big-time cheats and small-time hustlers, feds and nightclub racketeers, and chorus girls who know too much. There's also plenty to tug at the heartstrings. Young Jimmy worships his reprobate brother Bruce, whose drunken folly led to an accident that puts Jimmy in a leg brace. Bruce is guilt stricken and seeks redemption. There's a love story, family strife, manslaughter, courtroom suspense, a lenient prosecutor, and unlikely savior. And somewhere in there is a major endorsement for the Boy Scouts of America, then just fifteen years old. All in a running time barely longer than an hour.

The Primrose Path was blessed with talented hyphenates. The film's scenario came from Leah Baird who was better known as an actress but was a successful scenario writer and producer as well. She starred in and wrote the serial *Cynthia-of-the-Minute* from 1920 to 1925 and churned out nearly two dozen other scripts, predominately melodramas centered on women's lives. Her producing partner and husband, Arthur Beck, was president of Embassy Pictures where *Primrose Path* was made.

Producer Hunt Stromberg came to Hollywood in 1919 by way of an early stint as reporter for

the *St. Louis Times*. His film career began as publicity chief for Thomas Ince, but he was soon a successful independent producer-director of low-budget comedies, dramas, and westerns. Immediately after making *The Primrose Path*, he signed as in-house producer at Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, where he later oversaw *The Thin Man* series, as well as films for Greta Garbo, Jean Harlow, and Joan Crawford.

Minneapolis-born director Harry O. Hoyt came to make movies by way of an education at the University of Minnesota and Columbia. He wrote original stories for the screen while studying law at Yale and continued after starting a practice. Moviemaking won him over. Hoyt was a full-time screenwriter by 1916 and made his directorial debut in 1919. He continued to write scripts throughout his career, primarily melodramas. Even so, he is best remembered for the film he directed just before taking on *The Primrose Path*. Hoyt's dinosaur epic *The Lost World* (1925) from First National is a triumph of early stop-motion animation and other special effects and an inductee into the Library of Congress's National Film Registry.

Stuart Holmes as *Primrose's* sleazy Broadway producer Tom Canfield logged in more than five hundred acting credits, mostly villains, over a career that stretched into the 1960s. Somehow he found time to become an accomplished sculptor, too.

BLESSED WITH AN EXPRESSIVE FACE AND RADIANT PRESENCE

Square-jawed, cleft-chinned Wallace MacDonald as the troubled Bruce was a handsome actor the camera loved. He started in comedies, excelled at westerns after sound arrived, and became a story editor and producer at Columbia.

Though the plot revolves around MacDonald's hard-drinking gambler, Clara Bow is the star attraction. Born in Brooklyn to parents of English-Scottish-Irish ancestry, Bow survived an objectively awful childhood. Her father was often unemployed, while her mother suffered acute mental illness from a head injury, endangering Clara's life with her violent attacks. Childhood rape, incest, and hunger marked her for life.

Bow escaped at sixteen, winning magazine acting and beauty contests. The ebullient young actress made her screen debut in a minor role in the 1922 drama *Beyond the Rainbow*. From there her rise was swift, and she was a movie star by 1925. In *The Primrose Path*, Bow plays chorine Marilyn Merrill, the name no doubt a wry reference to popular Broadway musical star Marilyn Miller. Thanks to shrewd marketing of the 1927 Paramount comedy-romance *It*, Bow is forever remembered as the "It Girl." Essentially a coy euphemism for sex appeal, Bow's appellation obscures her very real talent as an actress. She commands the screen.

Blessed with an expressive face and radiant presence, there's never a moment's doubt what Marilyn is thinking and feeling. Bow's bobbed hair, bee-stung lips, and fashionable wardrobe came to define the modern young urban woman of the 1920s.

Bow's star power was growing, but *The Primrose Path* was no prestige outing. Distributed by a

small outfit based in New York, it was a so-called "daily changes" film; a print was moved from one theater to the next every day. "On a double picture day at the [Loew's] New York, it's get 'em in and out," noted *Variety* in its *Primrose Path* review.

As such, it was made more for a quick profit than artistic achievement. It was the kind of low priority film that would have been shelved and neglected once its commercial potential had been assumed to be exhausted. Over the years, as companies change ownership and memories fade, a title like *The Primrose Path* would have been left to rot or be incinerated at a studio spring-cleaning.

As luck would have it, *The Primrose Path* avoided such a fate. It's much better than its pedigree suggests, surviving as a stellar example of the unpretentious late silent melodrama. *Variety* noted it has a story "without mush," and though "there are a couple of laughs," it is ultimately "a velvety melodrama." It's also suspenseful, brisk, and engaging. Hoyt adds fine touches to Baird's ripe and rich scenario. A dockside scene involving an exchange of walking canes is deftly choreographed and filmed. When a mercenary character is killed, he is visualized as a fallen bird of prey. His right hand contorts like a talon in death, and his mouth an open beak. And when Bow cries, she deposits a



single sparkling diamond-like teardrop just below her eye.

The Primrose Path is even more significant as a template for genres and conventions to come. Its storyline of vice and crime foreshadows cautionary Warner Bros. gangster films of the 1930s and film noir of the 1940s. Its commitment to the suffering families of errant sons evokes *The Public Enemy* (1931), *Scarface* (1932), and *Dead End* (1937). But for all of its film harbingering, *The Primrose Path* can also be enjoyed today as a surprisingly entertaining diversion, made by gifted collaborators in front of and behind the camera.

— MATTHEW KENNEDY



Wallace MacDonald and Clara Bow



BLIND HUSBANDS

MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT BY MONT ALTO MOTION PICTURE ORCHESTRA

DIRECTED BY ERICH VON STROHEIM, USA, 1919

CAST Erich von Stroheim, Francelia Billington, Sam De Grasse, and Gibson Gowland **PRODUCTION** Universal Film Manufacturing Co. **PRINT SOURCE** Austrian Film Museum

“If we are not very much mistaken, *Blind Husbands* will introduce to the industry a new ‘super director’—Erich von Stroheim. Unlike many other directors who aspire to the ranks of the fortunate, he is not a near-Griffith, a near-De Mille, or a near-Tourneur. His work is quite in a class by itself.”

— Agnes Smith, *New York Telegraph*

Agnes Smith was not alone. Until the coming of Orson Welles, *Blind Husbands* was the most impressive directing debut in Hollywood history. And even today the most surprising, as no one was expecting to see great things from Erich von Stroheim, best known for throwing a screaming infant out a window in one of his many World War I propaganda pictures. How Stroheim made the leap from obsolete Prussian villain to the peer of Griffith and DeMille is a long story, or actually many different stories, sometimes told by the man himself, sometimes by historians who spend decades sorting fact from fantasy.

Stroheim insisted that a director should only work on material with which he was personally familiar and expected his audiences to approach his films as part of an ongoing biographical narrative. If he plays the handsome prince on screen, that’s because he is recreating moments of his own history. If he plays an Austrian cavalry officer on holiday in the Dolomites, that’s because he was one of those, too. As a Hollywood personality, he

expects to be forgiven for a bit of embroidery, some artistic touches to make things more interesting. What his wives thought when he put this same mask on for them is another matter. When he married Margaret Knox at her family home in Oakland in 1913, he boasted in the marriage certificate that his mother was the Baroness Bondy. Not true? Well, Margaret swore in the same document that her age was eighteen, around half the actual figure. A typical von Stroheim document, filled with alternate facts.

Stroheim had been spinning stories like this ever since he landed in New York in 1909, one more impoverished foreigner claiming an elevated status that could never have been his back in the old country. But things changed when he arrived in San Francisco in 1912 and began waiting tables at the West Point Inn on Mount Tamalpais. That’s where he first met Margaret, the woman he claimed introduced him to the work of Stephen Crane and Edgar Lee Masters and encouraged him to put those stories on paper. A few years later, in Hollywood, he could draw on the resources of Universal and MGM and send those stories around the world. And who better to play the handsome prince?

His climb through the ranks in Hollywood was slow but steady, and eventually he created a niche for himself as stuntman, assistant director, technical expert, and heavy lead on films like *Intolerance*,



Reaching for the Moon, and *The Heart of Humanity*. By 1918 he had cornered the market for Prussian villains, but the end of the war dried up those roles. Worse, he had alienated his contacts on the Fine Arts lot, killing any further chances with both Griffith and Fairbanks. When the Spanish Flu tore through Los Angeles that winter, Stroheim fell victim to that as well. Now separated from his second wife, Stroheim was nursed back to health by the family of Valerie Germonprez, an aspiring actress and hand model whom he married in 1920. According to Germonprez, she convinced him not to abandon the picture business and encouraged him to write a new style film for the postwar era. She remembered the first draft taking only two nights and a day.

Avoiding Universal's bureaucracy, Stroheim appealed directly to "Uncle" Carl Laemmle himself, the one studio head likely to cut a fellow German-speaking immigrant a break. There are various accounts of how he managed this, but Stroheim agreeing to work cheaply could not have been the only reason. Laemmle recognized something good when he saw it. *Blind Husbands* was far more expensive than the average Universal production, with a negative cost of \$112,000 topped by another \$140,000 for prints and advertising. Laemmle approved the construction of an entire

Tyrolean village, location trips to both Big Bear and Idyllwild, and a comfortable shooting schedule that dragged on from April 3 to June 12, 1919. This was serious support for an untried director, a no-star cast, and a property that wasn't even pre-sold.

Blind Husbands is a film about the manners and mores of resort living, where social inhibitions relax amid the pagan splendor of the mountains. An American couple are vacationing at Cortina d'Ampezzo, a mountain resort in the Dolomites. Stroheim had spent time in this area in 1903 (although not as part of any military service) and would have heard tales of the legendary Innerkofler family, pioneer mountain guides who first mastered many of the local peaks and ran the best hotels. Stroheim dedicated *Greed* to his mother, but his first film, *Blind Husbands*, is dedicated to mountain guide Sepp Innerkofler. How to explain this? And why did Stroheim apparently confuse Sepp, who died a war hero in 1915, with his uncle Michel, the Innerkofler really lost on Monte Cristallo in 1888? "Silent Sepp," the mountain guide played by Gibson Gowland (later the star of *Greed*), doesn't have much to do here, but the character appears to have cast an especially long shadow in Stroheim's imagination.

Cortina d'Ampezzo had been attracting German and British tourists for years, although not so many Americans as the film suggests (Ernest Hemingway didn't turn up until the 1920s). The area was already an established destination by 1891, name-checked in Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler* when Hedda brings out her honeymoon album, with its pictures of the Dolomites and Val d'Ampezzo. Her husband seems to have spent most of the trip researching his boring new book, and Stroheim's blind husband is equally obtuse. Though early reviews linked it to Schnitzler and Sudermann, this Stroheim film seems to belong more to Ibsen. A natural movie location, the area around Monte Cristallo inspired everyone from Leni Riefenstahl (*The Blue Light*) to James Bond (*For Your Eyes Only*). But that was later.

The film describes the location as "on the Austro-Italian frontier," which is one way of putting it. Part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire before the war, this was now Italian territory, the result of four years of brutal mountain combat. Indeed, the region's recent geopolitical history is not addressed at all here, and promotional material sent out by the studio tells us that the action takes place "three years after the end of the present war"—that is, sometime in the future! In this land of legend there are no battlefield markers and American tourists are ubiquitous, comfortably sharing the sights with a vacationing Austrian military officer, Lt. Eric von Steuben.

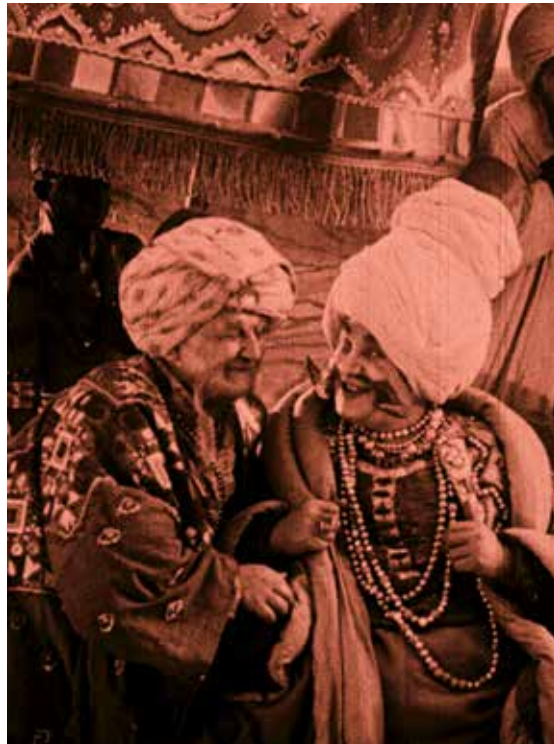
But while *Blind Husbands* may be a film about vacation hijinks at a mountain resort, I think it has less to do with Cortina d'Ampezzo than it does with the rugged landscape of northern California, where he stayed for two years and learned to live as an American. Winning the older and wealthier Margaret Knox during his time on Mount Tamalpais was only the beginning of the story. When that marriage collapsed in the summer of 1914 he fled to another mountain resort, Lake Tahoe, where he

worked for the summer rowing tourists around the lake, handling their horses and frying their fish.

According to stories he told his friend and biographer, Tom Curtiss, Stroheim made a special friend of one of these vacationers, a Mrs. Bissinger, "wife of a California millionaire." Impressed by his continental charm, she agreed to back production of a play he had written to the tune of \$500 (almost \$14,000 in today's money). How Mr. Bissinger figured in this equation is unknown. The play was a disaster, but by then Stroheim was already in Hollywood.

Carl Laemmle's gamble on this romantic mountain triangle paid off handsomely. At a time when the average Universal feature netted some \$55,000, *Blind Husbands* earned \$327,000 in its first year of release (a financial windfall that also distinguishes it from Welles's debut). And that figure doesn't even include its popularity overseas. In 1924 Universal reissued the film in a streamlined version that removed about nineteen minutes of footage. They did this without much damage to the plot, but reducing the length of individual shots and eliminating atmospheric footage seriously affected the pacing and milieu detail so characteristic of Stroheim's work. That cut was supplied to the Museum of Modern Art in 1941 and was subsequently regarded as the standard version. Then in 1982 a tinted nitrate copy dating from the original European release was acquired by the Austrian Film Museum. Struck from the same camera negative, this version was longer than the 1924 release but had suffered cuts of its own. The current restoration incorporates footage from both copies, with intertitles drawn from a surviving studio release continuity.

— RICHARD KOSZARSKI



WAXWORKS

MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT BY GUENTER BUCHWALD AND FRANK BOCKIUS

DIRECTED BY PAUL LENI, GERMANY, 1924

CAST Emil Jannings, Werner Krauss, Conrad Veidt, Wilhelm Dieterle, and Olga Belajeff **PRODUCTION** Neptune Film **ORIGINAL LANGUAGE TITLE** *Das Wachsfigurenkabinett* **PRINT SOURCE** Deutsche Kinemathek

Horror movies, or at least their progenitors, have been haunting audiences since the silent era, and the best ones can still make us shriek a hundred years later. With their sinister killers, hazy nightmares, and pointy-fingered vampires, all wrapped up in the menacing *mise-en-scène* that came to define German Expressionism, it's no wonder that films like *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* and *Nosferatu* are still so popular, especially around Halloween. But there's a strong case for adding Paul Leni's carnival of unease *Waxworks* to that list. Not exactly a horror movie, it has some undeniably eerie elements.

Waxworks (*Das Wachsfigurenkabinett*) was written by *Nosferatu* screenwriter Henrik Galeen and has the added curiosity of being an anthology film, with a frame story that anchors and occasionally bleeds into the chapters that follow. After this early example of the format, the horror genre has since returned to it again and again, with examples as varied as Mario Bava's 1963 *Black Sabbath*, 1982's George A. Romero-Stephen King collaboration *Creepshow*, 1983's *Twilight Zone: The Movie*, and the more recent *V/H/S* and ABCs of *Death* films. Anthology movies keep the pace moving, which for horror fans ideally means a higher frequency of scares, as well as a variety of monsters, styles, and moods, depending on the contents of each segment.

As the title suggests, *Waxworks* begins amid the chaos of a fun fair, a ghoulish environment that's already enough to put anyone on edge—even without the presence of wax figures so lifelike they're obviously actors holding very, very still for Leni to get the shot. Hungry for greater publicity, the proprietor of a wax museum and his enthusiastic daughter (Olga Belajeff) hire a writer (Wilhelm Dieterle, who soon left Germany for Hollywood and made his name as a director, with a filmography that included 1939's *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*) to let his imagination run wild and come up with "startling tales" to bolster three of their history-inspired figures.

First up is the rotund, gloriously mustachioed Harun al-Raschid, the Caliph of Baghdad (Emil Jannings), who has seemingly stepped straight out of *Arabian Nights*, except he's missing an arm. No matter; it's a flaw that the writer incorporates into an energetic tale about a baker (Dieterle), his alluring wife (Belajeff), and the lascivious ruler who pursues her. Next, we follow along as Ivan the Terrible (*Dr. Caligari* star Conrad Veidt) spreads his poisonous brand of cruelty among his subjects, including wrecking the wedding of characters again played by Dieterle and Belajeff. Finally, as the writer begins to succumb to fatigue after a long night's work, the wax figure of Spring-Heeled Jack (or Jack the Ripper, in the original German; either way, he's played by Werner Krauss) comes to life and chases

the other characters around a version of reality that holds its own mind-bending secrets.

Obviously, the presence of a mad monarch and a knife-wielding fiend more than qualify *Waxworks* to wave the horror flag, but that first segment—the longest; it takes up nearly half the film—has a comedic, almost slapstick tone, particularly during a madcap chase sequence involving that freshly severed arm. Audiences in 2022 might be less inclined to guffaw at the sight of the “mischief-



loving” Caliph sneaking into a house, locking the door behind him, and leering at the sleeping woman he finds there, but everything that happens between them is clearly playful, and Jannings’s performance is so exaggerated there’s no mistaking the whole thing is meant to be humorous. (Later, when Ivan the Terrible kidnaps a bride with unwholesome intentions, the tone is far less mirthful.) It’s interesting to note that when the film

premiered on November 13, 1924, the segments actually appeared in a different order, with Ivan the Terrible first, followed by Spring-Heeled Jack, and finally the “Baghdad burlesque,” as film scholar Joel Westerdale calls it. Soon after *Waxworks*’ first screening, Leni returned the order to that of Galeen’s original script, thus sealing the film’s tonal shift from light to dark.

Westerdale also gives an explanation for that unexplained *fourth* wax figure, impossible to miss alongside the other three in the museum (look for the pointy hat, which has the approximate dimensions of a traffic cone) but oddly never remarked upon. It was intended for use in a segment focusing on Corsican highwayman Rinaldo Rinaldini, which was never filmed for that most time-honored cinematic reason: budget cuts. According to the original script, Westerdale says, the Rinaldo chapter would have featured a zany gunfight, built around a

penny dreadful character who was more heroic than villainous. If it had been included, the entire tone of *Waxworks* would’ve been more evenly balanced between comedy and horror—and since Dieterle was to have played the dashing Rinaldo, it would have made for a more substantial arc for his writer character, who purposefully casts himself in bigger and bigger roles in his stories as the film goes on.

... THE MAJESTY OF THE FILM’S LAVISH SETS AND EXOTIC COSTUMES ...

Of course, we’ll never know what *Waxworks* would’ve been like had Leni been given enough funds for location shooting in Italy, as he’d originally intended for the Rinaldo interlude. We’ll also never be able to witness the original German version of *Waxworks*, since the only negative was lost in a Paris custom office fire in 1925. The digitally restored English version that premiered at Berlinale in February 2020 was created from nitrate prints of the existing English, French, and Czech language versions, with the title cards and the color concept in particular coming from a print housed in the British Film Institute. Even knowing that some frames are lost, and others never created in the first place, doesn’t lessen the majesty of the film’s lavish sets and exotic costumes, nor does it take away from certain key moments—like anytime Veidt burns through the screen with his piercing Ivan the Terrible glare.

Paul Leni’s last film in Germany before moving to Hollywood where he defined the “Old Dark House” genre, *Waxworks* is often cited as striking a balance between art-house and genre film, which almost makes it a precursor to the so-called “elevated horror” movies, *Hereditary* and *Us* being two examples that drew big audiences just a few years ago. But *Waxworks* is also a more direct ancestor of the enduringly popular “creepy waxwork” horror subgenre, which delights in

plots about murder victims being transformed into suspiciously lifelike wax statues, or wax statues coming to life and murdering people. Or both!

The most obvious starting point is 1933’s *Mystery of the Wax Museum*—a movie later remade twice as *House of Wax*, first in 1953 with Vincent Price, then in 2005 with Paris Hilton; both have their merits, despite what you’re thinking. All the films in this mold (see also: 1969’s *Nightmare in Wax*, 1973’s *Terror in the Wax Museum*, and 1988’s *Waxwork*; maybe even throw in 1979’s *Tourist Trap* if you never want to look at a mannequin the same way again) obviously skew far more gruesome than *Waxworks* ever does. But there’s no denying Leni’s film helped plant the idea that wax figures possess an inherent macabre quality that can inspire a writer’s imagination and a filmmaker’s lens—and thrill audiences for generations.

— CHERYL EDDY



KING OF THE CIRCUS

MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT BY PHILIP CARLI

DIRECTED BY ÉDOUARD-ÉMILE VIOLET, AUSTRIA, 1924

CAST Max Linder, Vilma Bánky, Eugen Günther, Eugen Burg, Viktor Franz, Fred Boston, and Julius von Szöreggy **PRODUCTION** Vita-Film **ORIGINAL LANGUAGE TITLE** *Max, Der Zirkuskönig* **PRINT**

SOURCE Lobster Films

IN Max Linder's final film, he indulged a common childhood fantasy. Expectations had been seeded in his childhood that he would grow up to take over the family business, a vineyard. However, he later wrote that "nothing was more distasteful to me than the thought of a life among the grapes." What stirred his imagination as a boy was the thrill of performance. He was enthralled by the traveling big tops and theater companies that rolled into town on occasion. He especially enjoyed the lurid Grand Guignol shows at the annual festival. At the age of forty, in a film studio in Austria, Linder finally got the chance to run away and join the circus.

Shooting began on *King of the Circus* (*Max, Der Zirkuskönig*) at the Vita-Film studios in Vienna in December 1923. In the film, Linder plays a gadding young aristocrat who falls in love with a trapeze artist, but he won't be able to win her hand in marriage until his mastery of circus skills rivals her own. He sets up an elaborate con so that he can impress the crowds with a daring act of circus bravery, but at the last minute, circumstances dictate that he has to do it for real. Comparisons are inevitable with Charlie Chaplin's later film *The Circus* (1928)—substitute the Little Tramp for Linder's tipsy count and the plots seem to share an abundance of DNA. The films are, however, very different in tone and action. Where these two big-top features bear comparison is in their behind-

the-scenes friction and production delays. Chaplin's centered on a very messy, public divorce, and Linder's woes foreshadowed a grimmer fate.

Linder had married Ninette Peters in the summer, and she was already pregnant by the time the couple arrived in Vienna, a few days later than anticipated. Her pregnancy seemed to diffuse Linder's angry displays of jealousy, but all was not well between them, nor at the studio. Toward the end of January 1924, a local newspaper reported that not a single frame of the film had been shot and that delays had been caused by Linder rejecting the apartment he had been supplied with for his stay, as well as refusing to work in a studio that was too cold (by one degree Celsius)—which may have been a requirement of his recovery from an accident one year previously. One more concrete detail was that the original director had a heart attack and returned to Paris, to be replaced by Édouard-Émile Violet. And then again there was a report of his costar Vilma Bánky being forced to repeat one action for multiple takes until her arms began to spasm. The reporter in question was forced to retract some of these claims, and the impression that Linder was deploying "chicanery" to delay the production, but there were more serious problems in the offing. On February 23, 1924, the press reported that Max and Ninette had attempted suicide via a joint overdose of barbiturates. Both parties survived after being taken

THE MEET-CUTE WITH BÁNKY'S TRAPEZE ARTIST KETTY IS ONE OF LINDER'S DARKER GAGS (AND HE WAS KNOWN FOR THEM)

to a local sanatorium for treatment, and the police seemed not to think the incident worthy of a report. Twenty months later, however, the couple died in eerily similar circumstances, at Linder's hands, leaving their baby daughter Maud an orphan.

This, then, is Linder's final completed feature film. His previous film had been something of a departure. *Au Secours!* (1924), directed by Abel Gance, is an oddity in many ways, not least because it is not an out-and-out comedy. This two-reeler is essentially a horror film with some comic and gruesome elements, featuring Linder as a newlywed who makes a bet that he can stay in a haunted house from 11 p.m. to midnight. This was the film Linder chose to make on his return to France after his second, somewhat deflating, stint in Hollywood.

King of the Circus is a feature-length film that promises, and delivers, a much more straightforward scenario, with plenty of opportunities for Linder to flex his slapstick muscles and to inhabit the dapper "Max" persona that made him famous. Linder portrays playboy aristocrat Comte de Pompadour, the "dissipated nephew" of a strict guardian who insists that he settle down. The young count is a confirmed

bachelor, or in his baffling choice of words, a "vegetarian," and this frisky herbivore deploys subterfuge to sneak out for a party, which will lead us into our first extended comedy set-piece as Linder runs riot in a nightclub. The jokes often arrive at Pompadour's expense. Even before he leaves the hotel he is stuck with a coat-hanger tucked into his dinner jacket and he will end the sequence sliding out of the same coat, which is hung up on a peg.



The implication is clear, that Linder won't get to play the debonair smoothie in this film. After a night of debauchery, Linder executes a very funny routine as a man too drunk and disoriented to get into bed, or even to hang his hat on the bedpost. The punchline for Pompadour is a gag we have been in on since the start—that's not his bedroom but a display in a furniture store window. Pompadour awakes from his boozy slumbers to find a jeering crowd has assembled on the other side of the glass to watch him snore. Happily the humiliation is brief, as the count is still far too drunk to comprehend his predicament. Nevertheless, his discomfort with audiences, being in front of them, or part of them, emerge as a theme in the film.

The meet-cute with Bánky's trapeze artist Kitty is one of Linder's darker gags (and he was known for them). Struggling to choose between the three possible brides his uncle has chosen for him, Pompadour decides to aim his gun at their photographs and the first to fall will be his wife.

Instead, he hits a live target, grazing Kitty's arm with his bullet as she passes by. Once Pompadour's romantic mission is established, the film settles into a more conventional comedy mode, with humorous highlights including Pompadour's awkwardness among the crowd at the circus as he witnesses Kitty's act,

his mismanagement of a flea circus (an inadvertent act of revenge on the audience?), his interactions with a gaggle of overbearing clowns, and, best of all, his improvised circus-training camp in his hotel room. This last consists of rope, precariously balanced furniture, a stepladder, and the deft assistance of the count's lanky valet. Each move is performed at high risk, and with deceptively little skill. It's pure clowning, albeit without an audience. It's offstage, too, that Pompadour performs his final trick, "defeating" the lion, earning the respect of the circus master and the right to woo the girl of his dreams. But he'll take his bow in the limelight, applauded by the audience, who are finally, unequivocally on his side.

The film does end on a surprisingly quiet note, however, with the lovers alone in the circus ring, engrossed in each other's company and letting the sawdust stream through their fingers, unaware that the audience has long since left the tent. The film seems to say that after Max's moment of triumph, after the courtship and the wedding, life must go on, with two people passing time together in private. There's a poignancy to this final scene that allows a moment of reflection, for the film itself, for Linder's screen career, and for his marriage, viewed through the dubious benefit of hindsight. It's an unexpected deep breath, after an hour of winningly elastic comedy, from one of the silent screen's kings of slapstick.

— PAMELA HUTCHINSON



THE GREAT VICTORIAN MOVING PICTURE SHOW

LARGE FORMAT FILMS FROM THE BRITISH FILM INSTITUTE (1896–1901)

NARRATED BY BFI'S BRYONY DIXON WITH MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT BY STEPHEN HORNE AND FRANK BOCKIUS

The past, like a moving picture, looks different depending where you are standing in relation to it; it is a matter of distance, scale, and clarity. In 1893, in the earliest days of moving pictures, viewing was a solitary activity, seen on a machine for one person at a time—and small—as small as the screen on your mobile phone. How ironic that we see that as an achievement when our 19th century forbears were competing to realize the exact opposite—the bigger picture. W.K.L. Dickson (who will be a key figure in our show) developed the 35mm celluloid film for the Kinetoscope while working for Thomas Edison, but it proved difficult to make money with the individual viewer. It was thought far better to enlarge those fascinating moving images onto a big screen, as the magic lantern did, so that greater numbers of paying customers could view them at once, and more clearly. And so the race was on to find a way to project moving pictures.

Dickson himself decided join the game. He left Edison and joined a consortium of businessmen to develop a projectable film on a format larger than 35mm, to avoid any legal entanglements

with his former employer. He opted for a film stock already available for still photography—we call it 68mm—which could be used for projection as films as well as doubling up as flickbook reels for their version of a single-viewer machine, the Mutoscope. But Dickson was not alone—others such as John Prestwich in England and Georges Demeny in France for Gaumont also developed large formats, this time on 60mm. At four times the size of 35mm these fabulously clear and steady films could fill the proscenium of a large theater. They astonished early audiences and captured for us to see, more than 120 years later, the end of the Victorian age in all its variety and splendor.

When BFI decided to digitize its entire collection of Victorian film—that is everything from 1895 to 1901—it seemed a good moment to attempt the digital restoration of a small group of nonstandard formats that had survived from the turn of the last century. Some of these very fragile prints had been duplicated in the pre-digital days by reducing to standard 35mm film, but here was an opportunity to see how much extra quality could be reproduced through digital scanning. The result is this program

of British films from the Victorian era where you can see for yourselves how they would have looked on the big screen. It consists of the surviving larger format prints in the BFI collections—two by Prestwich and three by the Gaumont company on 60mm, and the rest 68mm films by the British Mutoscope and Biograph Company, fourteen of which are held by Eye Filmmuseum.

These rare surviving large format films show a miscellany of views, the pageantry of state occasions, people making funny faces, trains thundering towards the screen, dancers whirling, panoramas of exotic cities, waves crashing against a pier—in short anything that looked good in movement. Dickson, who left the U.S. to film Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in 1897, set up the British Mutoscope and Biograph Company, which shared content with the American company. His strategy was to produce a prestige product, with steadier, clearer pictures of the best subjects. The company negotiated a regular slot at the highly prestigious Palace Theatre of Varieties, a large new music hall in London's West End. He recorded on film the fixed events of the British Victorian calendar: thrilling sporting events, military parades, spectacular ship launches, glorious phantom rides, and films of Victorian entertainers from grand Shakespearean actors to music hall artistes. He also traveled widely to film more extraordinary events, returning with pictures from the heart of the action during the Boer War in South Africa, and he even negotiated to film the pope in Rome.

These films give us a new perspective on the Victorian period. The extraordinary quality and clarity of the large format images bring a sense of immediacy and direct connection. These fragmentary moments capture gestures and aspects of human behavior, such as humor, tenderness, and spontaneity, which help dispel any preconceptions



of the stiff, austere Victorian, which we have absorbed from still photographs.

Writers in papers and magazines of the time waxed lyrical about the properties of the new medium. As R.H. Mere declared in "The Wonders of the Biograph," his 1899 article for *Pearson's Magazine*: "Posterity will have good cause to bless the nineteenth century geniuses who were responsible for the invention of the Biograph ... Already we look back and witness, as they occurred in real life, events of the last two or three years, which might never have been faithfully preserved without the Biograph's help. For example, we may watch each incident in the Queen's triumphal procession through the streets of London on the day of her Diamond Jubilee. Providing the films are still in existence our descendants in a thousand years may do likewise." Mere, like Boleslaw Matuszewski in France, already foresaw the need to archive the films as

historical documents, and he clearly considered that as film's most important feature. He imagined a hundred years hence that people would be able to see "by merely turning a handle" all the "stirring events" of the century.

It has been a *little* more complicated than that. Film hasn't survived very well. It is vulnerable to physical and chemical deterioration but also to being undervalued over time. The few surviving rolls of these large format films are very, very fragile. In places the emulsion peels off the base and floats on the slightest breeze like gold leaf, carrying away forever those precious images of the past. Each of the half-minute long films had to be carefully unrolled and photographed frame-by-frame using an 8k digital camera. It has been a monumental task but now we can see the past more clearly and see these beautiful fragments, as they should be seen, on the big screen.

— BRYONY DIXON



STEAMBOAT BILL, JR.

MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT BY MONT ALTO MOTION PICTURE ORCHESTRA

DIRECTED BY CHARLES REISNER AND BUSTER KEATON, USA, 1928

CAST Buster Keaton, Ernest Torrence, Marion Byron, Tom Lewis, and Tom McGuire **PRODUCTION** Buster Keaton Productions **PRINT SOURCE** Cohen Film Collection

In a way, Buster Keaton's fall—the big, metaphorical one, the first in his life he couldn't bounce right back from—began when that housefront collapsed over him in *Steamboat Bill, Jr.* In what is now his most famous stunt, Buster remains unharmed, framed in an open attic window just wide enough to clear his body by two inches on each side. Today this is probably the best remembered of Keaton's grand-scale set pieces, included in countless classic film montages and circulated online as a mesmerizing repeating gif.

The stunt is infinitely rewatchable, worth slowing down to advance frame by frame. You can choose to focus on Keaton's uncanny stillness as the weight of the wall rushes toward him and the neat timing of his delayed reaction as he rubs the back of his neck in confusion, processes his changed circumstances, then takes off at a run with a distrustful glance backward at the pile of wrecked lumber. Or you can try to spot the ropes, barely visible in the exposed cross section of house, that held the two-ton façade upright until the moment the camera rolled. Three men from the crew had been crouched on the roof out of sight, ready to cut the ropes whenever Buster's codirector, Charles Reisner, called action. The whole construction was rigged by Keaton's longtime production designer, the ingenious Fred "Gabe" Gabourie, and it remains a mechanical marvel even now. Keaton later recalled the tense atmosphere on set that day:

"Cameramen, electricians and extras prayed as we shot that scene, and I don't mind saying I did a little praying myself."

This shot is the culmination of a long-developing gag that began with a flimsy piece of stage scenery in the 1919 Arbuckle-Keaton short *Back Stage* and mutated into the revolving hinged wall in *One Week* (1920) that lifts leading lady Sybil Seely up in the air while framing Buster in a window opening below. It is the window gag's logical end point, with suspense and the potential for mortal danger added on to the goofy prop comedy of the original joke. In that sense, it is the most quintessential of Keaton gags. Since his childhood stardom in vaudeville, Buster had been getting this kind of double mileage out of his most daredevil stunts: he could risk his life and make it funny.

But the day the real-life wall fell, the Sunday of Labor Day weekend of 1927, must have felt to Buster not like a delivery from doom but the experience of being delivered up to it. The housefront, happily, failed to crush him, but something else just had. The day before the scene was to be filmed, Keaton's producer and brother-in-law Joe Schenck had informed him that the Buster Keaton Studio, along with the rest of Schenck's production companies, was about to be shut down. *Steamboat Bill, Jr.* would be Keaton's last independently produced film.

PERHAPS THE GREATEST IN THE STRING OF BRILLIANT FEATURE FILMS...

The consolidation of American film production into the “Big Five” studios of Golden Age Hollywood—MGM, 20th Century-Fox, Warner Bros., RKO Radio Pictures, Paramount—was essentially a done deal by late 1927, even if not all those companies had yet assumed their final form under those names. Joe Schenck had held on to the old independent model far longer than most producers of his ilk. Hollywood movies were a big enough business by then to require economies of scale: not a handful of multipurpose crew members building sets on a studio lot the size of one square block, but vast production complexes that were like miniature cities, staffed with departments of specialists who rotated from film to film: costumers, scriptwriters, electricians, carpenters, animal trainers.

Keaton had never had a head for business, but even he must have recognized well before his and Schenck’s Labor Day weekend talk that the film industry was changing. The disappointing reception of *The General* (1926) and the middling performance of *College* (1927) had been on both his and Schenck’s minds over the past year. And though the release of *The Jazz Singer* would not kick the sound revolution into high gear until that October, everyone in Hollywood was already well aware that talking pictures were the coming thing.

All of this to say that by the summer of 1927, as Keaton and Gabourie were devising the collapsing housefront and the rest of the falling, flying, floating,

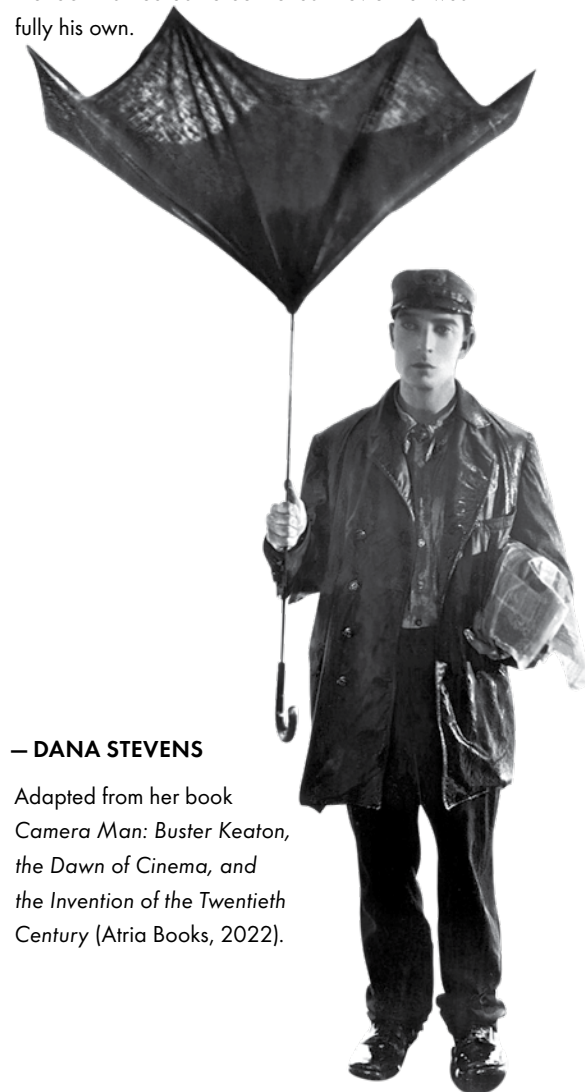
and sinking sets that swirl through the dreamlike finale of *Steamboat Bill, Jr.*, the writing was on the wall for the end of silent pictures. Yet no one could have predicted how quickly and violently the industry that had produced them would transform, or how soon that change would be followed by the disaster of the Great Depression. In any case, Keaton had never been one for keeping up with the writing on Hollywood walls. He hadn’t needed to. For ten years, with Schenck’s protection, he had been working at a remove from the increasingly rigid laws of the movie marketplace. Schenck’s initially hands-off approach allowed Keaton the freedom to try ambitious experiments that might or might not earn back their negative cost.

But as of that Labor Day weekend, Keaton could no longer ignore the fact that his time as an independent filmmaker with a quasi-fraternal patron was over. He continued for several more years as a rich and famous movie star; in fact, he was about to be handed the most lucrative job he had ever had when, at Schenck’s urging, he signed a contract to become a star player at MGM. But never again in his life would he enjoy the freedom to conceive, shoot, edit, and star in a production like *Steamboat Bill, Jr.*, built from the ground up with a handpicked crew of trusted collaborators. The trajectory his career had followed from early childhood to early middle age, that smooth and steady upward arc, had hit its peak and was about to start a steep, perilous drop.

Steamboat Bill, Jr. may be Keaton’s most mature film, a fitting if too early farewell to the era of creative independence he had just lived through. Its relationship to the rest of its creator’s work has been compared to that of Shakespeare’s last play, *The Tempest*. Keaton was only thirty-two at the time of *Steamboat Bill*’s release, and he still had many films left to make (albeit only two more, *The Cameraman* and *Spite Marriage*, that could be said to be, for the most part, his). Appropriately enough, his last independent production has a reflective, autumnal mood that sets it apart from mid-1920s masterworks like *The Navigator* and *The General*. Even if it had not turned out to be his last independent feature, *Steamboat Bill, Jr.* might have marked the end of a certain arc in his career. It revisits images and themes that had been central to his life since long before he started in film: the antagonistic relationship between a father and son, the seductive illusions of stagecraft, and the instability of “home.”

Steamboat Bill, Jr. may resemble other Keaton movies in its setting—like *Our Hospitality* and *The General*, it takes place in a romanticized version of the South, and like *The Boat* and *The Navigator*, it takes place mainly aboard a boat—but the psychological space it explores has more to do with the old onstage rivalry between Buster and his father Joe Keaton, the driving conflict of their long-ago knockabout act in vaudeville. But by 1927, eleven years after the breakup of the Three Keatons, the son’s motivation is no longer the antiauthoritarian mischief of a clever boy. Willie Canfield—the second protagonist of a Keaton film to be designated a “junior,” after the would-be detective hero of *Sherlock, Jr.* in 1924—wants to earn his father’s good opinion and ultimately his love. If I see *Steamboat Bill, Jr.* as a pinnacle of

Keaton’s art, perhaps the greatest in the string of brilliant feature films he produced between 1923 and 1928, it is because I sense in the final reconciliation between Willie and his father (the magnificent Ernest Torrence) something like a reckoning between the younger Buster and his own overbearing and often difficult dad. This seems to me as frank an autobiographical moment of wish fulfillment as Keaton ever put in a movie, and whether intended or not, there is symbolic power in the fact it turned out to be the last movie that was fully his own.



— DANA STEVENS

Adapted from her book *Camera Man: Buster Keaton, the Dawn of Cinema, and the Invention of the Twentieth Century* (Atria Books, 2022).

KEATON SPEAKS



Could you please tell us something about *Steamboat Bill, Jr.*, with the big cyclone at the end you get the impression that the whole set is being systematically destroyed? It must have been one of the most elaborate of all your films to stage.

The original story I had was about the Mississippi, but we actually used the Sacramento River in California, some six hundred miles north of Los Angeles. We went up there and built that street front, three blocks of it, and built the piers and so on. We found the river boats right there in Sacramento: one was brand new, and we were able to age the other one up to make it look as though it was ready to fall apart. My original situation in that film was a flood. But my so-called producer on the film was Joe Schenck, who at that time was producing Norma Talmadge, Constance Talmadge, and myself, and who later became president of United Arts. Then later on Twentieth Century-Fox was Joe Schenck, and his brother Nicholas Schenck was head man of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. Schenck was supposed to be my producer but he never knew when or what I was shooting. He just turned me loose.

At the 1965 Venice Film Festival, a short Buster Keaton had made with Samuel Beckett called *Film* had its premiere. John Gillett and James Blue used the occasion to conduct a wide-ranging interview with the Great Stone Face on behalf of *Sight and Sound* magazine. Excerpted below are the portions about *Steamboat Bill, Jr.*

Well, the publicity man on *Steamboat Bill* goes to Schenck and he says: "He can't do a flood sequence because we have floods every year and too many people are lost. It's too painful to get laughs with." So Schenck told me, "You can't do a flood." I said, "That's funny, since it seems to me that Chaplin during World War I made a picture called *Shoulder Arms*, which was the biggest money-maker he'd made at that time. You can't get a bigger disaster than that, and yet he made his biggest laughing picture out of it." He said, "Oh, that's different." I don't know why it was different. I asked if it was all right to make a cyclone, and he agreed that was better. Now he didn't know it, but there are four times more people killed in the United States by hurricanes and cyclones than by floods. But it was all right as long as he didn't find this out, and so I went ahead with my technical man [Fred Gabourie] and did the cyclone.

How about the technical side? The marvelous shot, for instance, of the front of the building falling on you, so that you are standing in the window as it hits the ground. What were the problems in staging that scene?

First I had them build the framework of this building and make sure that the hinges were all firm and solid. It was a building with a tall V-shaped roof, so that we could make this window up in the roof exceptionally high. An average second story window would be about twelve feet, but we're up about eighteen feet. Then you lay this framework down on the ground, and build the window around me. We built the window so that I had a clearance of two

inches on each shoulder, and the top missed my head by two inches and the bottom of my heels by two inches. We mark the ground out and drive big nails where my two heels are going to be. Then you put that house back up in position while they finish building it. They put the front on, painted it, and made the jagged edge where it tore away from the main building; and then we went in and fixed the interiors so that you're looking at a house that the front has blown off. Then we put up our wind machines with the big Liberty motors. We had six of them and they are pretty powerful: they could lift a truck right off the road. Now we had to make sure that we were getting our foreground and background wind effect, but that no current ever hit the front of that building when it started to fall, because if the wind warps her she's not going to fall where we want her, and I'm standing right out front. But it's a one-take scene and we got it that way. You don't do those things twice.

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APART FROM YOU

MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT BY GUENTER BUCHWALD

DIRECTED BY MIKIO NARUSE, JAPAN, 1933

CAST Mitsuko Yoshikawa, Sumiko Mizukubo, Akio Isono, Reikichi Kawamura, Tatsuko Fuji, Jun Arai, and Choko Iida **PRODUCTION** Shochiku **ORIGINAL LANGUAGE TITLE** *Kimi to Wakarete* **PRINT SOURCE** National Film Archive of Japan

A *part from You* (*Kimi to Wakarete*) is Mikio Naruse's third surviving silent film—one of only five we have left. Like many of his most celebrated works, it is an ode to the working class, the downtrodden and the disrespected, particularly women. Yet the man himself was no radical. Naruse, creator of the selfless, driven, deeply ethical geishas of *Apart from You*, was a studio loyalist; one who usually worked with an all-male crew; who never communicated with his actors more than necessary; who spoke little of his own politics and wrote no memoirs. His films still speak boldly, but he feels absent. We want to know him better.

Mikio Naruse was born in Tokyo in 1905 to a poor family. He joined Shochiku film company at age fifteen as a prop man, directing his first film there ten years later, the silent *Mr. and Mrs. Swordplay*, now lost. He moved to Photo-Chemical Laboratories (PCL, later Toho) in 1935, remaining at Toho for the rest of his career. A popular director who shared several top talents with Yasujiro Ozu, Naruse first became known overseas for his 1935 talkie, *Wife! Be Like a Rose!*, which continued themes he established in *Apart from You* and his other silents. His later sound work includes the masterful *Late Chrysanthemums* (1954), *Flowing* (1956), and, perhaps his most famous film, *When a Woman Ascends the Stairs* (1960).

Wider recognition, at least in the West, came late. For years Naruse did not receive the international attention his contemporaries did; film scholar Catherine Russell notes that "it wasn't until a retrospective of twenty-four films in Locarno, Italy, in 1983 that the larger body of work began to circulate outside Japan." Even today the director's name seems a notch below Ozu's, Mizoguchi's, and Kurasawa's, and his films are harder to find.

Naruse's two earliest surviving films, *Flunky, Work Hard* (1931) and *No Blood Relation* (1932), are of a piece with *Apart from You*. Just under thirty minutes long, *Flunky* is a dark comedy about a hapless salary man with a wife, two kids, and little money. It's loaded with visual effects—complex wipes, superimpositions, animation, and shots of undeveloped stock—most of them used to indicate the protagonist's emotional state. In *No Blood Relation*, released the following year, we're treated to a series of fast zooms on characters' faces, indicating shock. Thick with melodrama, *No Blood Relation* tells the story of an impoverished stepmother whose husband goes to jail. Though she's the only mother her stepdaughter has ever known, the law gives precedence to the girl's birth mother—a wealthy actress who abandoned the family but has recently had a change of heart.

Apart from You shifted focus to the underclass. The film is about an aging geisha, Kikue (Mitsuko

Yoshikawa), and a young one, Terugiku (Sumiko Mizukubo), trying to keep Kikue's son Yoshio (Akio Isono) from turning to crime. By the end of the film, which is barely an hour long, Terugiku has confronted not only Yoshio (who's hardly younger than she is), but also her own shiftless parents who want her younger sister to become a geisha as well, for the sake of their finances. Both young women, by virtue of their sex, are seen as commodities.

There is little camera trickery in *Apart from You*, especially compared to *Flunky*, *Work Hard* made only two years earlier. Aside from one use of

regret. Naruse occasionally filmed Terugiku the same way. But such is Mizukubo's charisma that simple close-ups are more effective, and there are many of them in *Apart from You*—a generally quieter film. Naruse went on to make many more such quiet films.

For Naruse, it's often poverty (or the threat of it) that costs people their dignity. In *No Blood Relation* it's understood that the father would not have gone to jail if he'd been willing to take his ex-wife's money. *Wife! Be Like a Rose!* casts both the husband and wife in unsympathetic light: he a dreamy

prospector, she an unpaid poetry teacher ("Do poems make money?" "Hardly.") Both are supported by more practical (female) loved ones. Auto accidents—sudden catastrophes that hit poor families hardest—occur frequently in the surviving silents. It is common to see sick or

injured characters bedridden, sheets tucked up to their necks, surrounded by relatives or friends, in a state of total vulnerability.

Poverty and womanhood are states of being, not measures of moral worth. By juxtaposing women's character with their social status, Naruse challenged both sexism and classism and shined a

spotlight on the subpar quality of the men. All his greatest heroines serve men, whether as loyal wives or doting mothers, or waitresses, or geishas (a role that does not equate to prostitute, but carries with it, always, the threat of sexual exploitation). The men, by contrast, are needy, one way or another—lazy, scrawny, impractical, addicted—and remain so, no matter how much support they get, until the women explode with contempt. "Times aren't that tough," rages Terugiku at her father. "You're just a drunken loafer!" To be male and rich is to have respect, deserved or not. Naruse's heroines are handed nothing, but they earn our respect in the end.

Much is written nowadays about the expectations placed on women—how they must be all things to all people. Terugiku typifies this. To the men at the geisha house she's a companion, a distraction, and a body. To her sister she's a shield; to her parents, a source of income; to Kikue a friend. Yoshio, for whom Terugiku must be both mentor and guide, is the most complicated. He loves her, and why wouldn't he? She is a beautiful woman possessed of a quiet certainty about the world, selfless and deeply moral; practically a saint. But she has her own problems, and no one's helping her. "As sad as life may get," she says, "I'll manage."

We know that Naruse understood all this, but not from anything he said. It's only through filmmaking that he speaks to us. In *Terugiku*, he created a woman who must be judged by her actions, rather than her gender, wealth, birthright, or occupation—most of what makes up her identity. Naruse's identity is likewise a poor guide to the man. While the director worked with two female screenwriters in his later career—Yoko Mizuki (seven films) and Sumie Tanaka (six)—much of his earlier work, addressing many of the same core themes, he wrote himself or with other men. He rarely socialized with

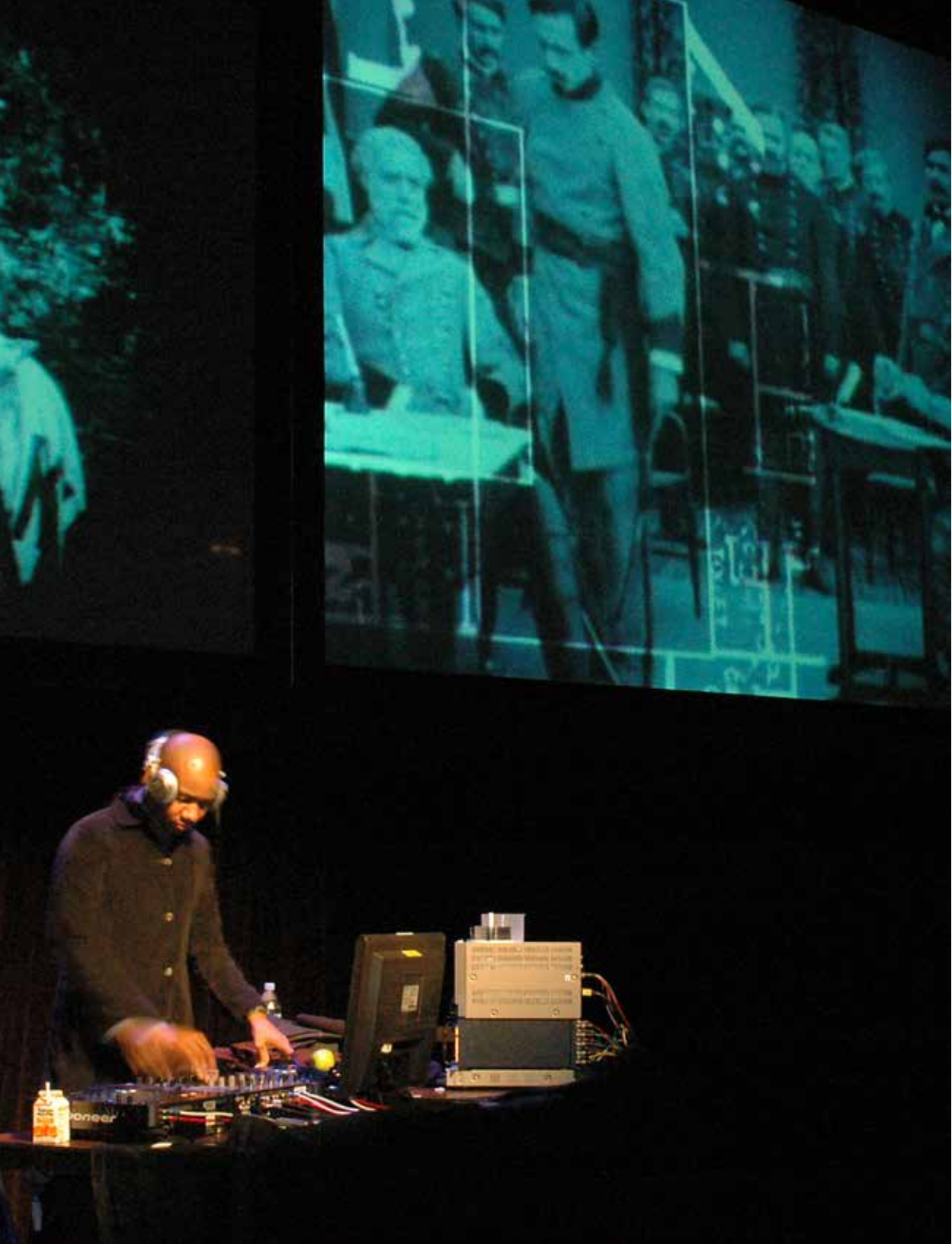
his actors, female or male, and was infamous for giving no feedback, positive or otherwise, on their performances. *When a Woman Ascends the Stairs* star Hideko Takamine revealed some of what she knew of Naruse after his death. He had wanted to make a movie with no sets and no color, she said, "just a single white curtain as a backdrop." She remembered him combing sets before filming, removing little props like flower vases and framed pictures. He seemed not only absent, but eager to perpetuate that absence. What remains are his actions: his work on screen.

How much, though, Naruse gave to us. To watch his best movies is to see our deepest held convictions acted out in something like daily life—a sort of religious praxis on film. You can't help but reflect where you've fallen short yourself. Are you the giver or the taker? The supporter or the supported? And which do you want to be? Terugiku was that rare person who lives her convictions, and Naruse, if we can attribute any thought to him with certainty, wants us to be more like her.

— CHRIS EDWARDS



double-exposure early in the film (a hungry geisha imagines herself a bowl of noodles), Naruse uses only quick zooms. As in *No Blood Relation*, these occur in scenes of conflict, the most memorable being Yoshio's fight with Kikue. He asks her, "Why shouldn't I drink? Look who I have for a mother." The camera flies toward Kikue's stunned and wounded face, then to Yoshio's, already showing



REBIRTH OF A NATION

**LIVE MUSIC BY DJ SPOOKY AND CLASSICAL REVOLUTION
WITH GUENTER BUCHWALD**

ONSTAGE CONVERSATION WITH DJ SPOOKY AND WESLEY MORRIS AFTER SCREENING

Live DJ remix and silent films would appear to sit at opposite ends of the media landscape, but in the hands of DJ Spooky (Paul D. Miller), the interplay between the historical and the contemporary is a chance to reveal the intricacies of both. In this remix of *The Birth of a Nation*, images and sounds from a century ago are re-formatted, juxtaposed, and re-examined in order to interrogate both their particular meanings and the ways that film can sometimes show us both the best and worst of our own culture.

For all of cinema's glorious successes in the past 125 years, it has also been unique among art forms in that it carries a sin that has haunted it for nearly its entire life. Just as film was entering its young adulthood in the feature era of the teens, *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) came to define both the possibilities of cinema and its ugliest, basest instincts. We sometimes forget how profoundly *The Birth of a Nation* has shaped cinema culture, because it is the only history we have, but in every decade since it was released, people who love cinema have had to grapple with this racist epic that stands near the headwaters of the form itself. From the earliest film retrospectives at the "Little Theatres" and the Museum of Modern Art in the 1920s and '30s, through the cinema club era of mid-century, and into our modern epoch where films are studied in universities, scholars and critics and fans have argued continuously about this film

that is a beautifully constructed tribute to hatred, bigotry, and fear.

For cinema's first three decades, it was a medium of the now, a popular entertainment barely regarded as an art form. It was only in the late 1920s that some cinephiles began to program "historical" films, some of which were only a decade old. The development of film had been so rapid in its first decades that even films that were five years old were often regarded as unsophisticated or ridiculous. There was a growing awareness though that film had a history like any other art form, and it could be traced through various "masterpieces" that defined different periods. By the time the Museum of Modern Art began its film library in 1935, there was a strong sense that American film history was best defined by D.W. Griffith, whose *The Birth of a Nation* and *Intolerance* (1916) could hold their own against the best of European film. An acknowledgement of the profound racism of *The Birth of a Nation* was often weighed against a desire to preserve a place in the emerging canon for America's most prominent director.

In the cinema clubs that created and nurtured film culture in the middle of the 20th century, there was often a much stronger sense of the depth of Griffith's sins. This was at the same moment as the development of the idea that film history was an intriguing and worthwhile subject, so while cinephiles tended to firmly reject Griffith's claim that

he had told the story of Reconstruction truthfully, there was no way to tell the story of cinema without his works. When film studies seeped into the academy in the latter half of the 20th century, it often arrived in literature departments heavily influenced by New Criticism, which emphasized the form of literature rather than its social or historical context. For *The Birth of a Nation*, this usually meant that the focus was on Griffith's editing or cinematography rather than on his white supremacist message, and generations of college students were often asked to "set aside" the content and to see the film as a masterclass in moviemaking.

It was in the context of this century-long intellectual and moral struggle that DJ Spooky went back to this original sin of cinema in the early part of the 21st century to perform what he called a "digital exorcism." His *Rebirth of a Nation* uses images from the film that are re-purposed and played against each other, dissembling the master's house with both the master's tools and plenty of new ones. Racist stereotypes and vicious slanders are ripped from their narrative bases and re-imagined as complicated signifiers of our past and present narratives of race. As he puts it, confronting these images can make them absurd, and his project provides an opportunity to confront the film with its own paradoxes.

As useful as it is to confront the racist stereotypes in Griffith's work, DJ Spooky's project is more profound than that. He imagines it as "a deep analysis of how American culture is structured around a series of clichés structured around race," and while the focus of *The Birth of a Nation* is relations between Black and white people during Reconstruction, Spooky is more than aware that these clichés affect others as well. *Rebirth of a Nation* was initially conceived in the aftermath of

the 2004 revelations about prisoner abuse at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq, and he notes that part of what had happened there was that prisoners had been cast into preconceived roles. That is not to imply of course that any of this is "play," but instead that the ways that film and media train us to see each other can have devastating and deadly real-world implications.

The Birth of a Nation has been the subject of much scholarly analysis and writing over the years, but there is something unique about the approach that remix affords. Spooky notes that part of the impetus for remix was that it was a way to think about information structure, about "how people move between media like moving between different languages." Remix offers us the chance to shift between these media languages, a process he refers to as a type of "creolization."

Regular attendees of the SFSFF who feel like they have a reasonable fluency in the language of silent film will likely have a different experience of *Rebirth of a Nation* than those who are new to the festival. This is not to say that one needs a particular background to understand the project, only to note that images and sequences will have different resonances for different audience members, depending on who we are and what we bring to the screening.

There can be little doubt that DJ Spooky has been able to find an audience for his work. *Rebirth of a Nation* has been playing in museums and universities around the world since 2004, a remarkable run for a project that would seem to exist at the intersection of two niche media cultures. Its success demonstrates both Spooky's skill and the possibilities and potential of letting intriguing new art forms exorcise the demons of the old.

— PAUL MCEWAN

EXORCISE THE DEMONS OF THE OLD



A FILM FUELS A MOVEMENT

BY SHARI KIZIRIAN

Birth of a Nation was D.W. Griffith's magnum opus and he knew it. He took everything from his seven years of filmmaking—cross-cutting to build suspense, conveying emotion and mood with composition and lighting and movement—and put it all into an unprecedented twelve-reel feature. He wanted recognition, and he deserved it after toiling anonymously (and being paid on a per-foot basis) in a system that preferred to brand the studios rather than promote its talent. He wanted ads in the trades identifying him with the title and an opening night at a legitimate theater of a kind that had already been bestowed on imported Italian features like *Que Vadis?* He wanted a full orchestra to play a rousing score to include Wagner's "Ride of the Valkyries" and the "Klansmen call" (which he used to cry out spontaneously on set). He wanted the world to see the potential of film as an art and him as an artist.

That Griffith carried his racism along with his genius into moviemaking is a terrible fact of our film heritage, and like an expertly cut trailer for a terrible film, *Birth* advertises a false American story. The film is so ingeniously crafted, so overwhelming to watch, that most white audiences didn't question the history it purported to depict. When it premiered in Los Angeles at Clune's Auditorium with in-house

orchestral accompaniment, the applause, it was said, "came in deafening waves."

The NAACP had tried to get the film censored in L.A., and, for the film's East Coast debut, the six-year-old civil rights group lobbied members of New York City's board of censors to ban the film or at least insist on cuts. One NYC censor called for the banning of the entire second half, which contains the attempted rapes and dramatic rescue by the Ku Klux Klan. Hardly anyone objected to the insidious setup of the first reels that paint the slave-holding South in idyllic tones. Meanwhile, to generate publicity for *Birth*'s NYC premiere, horses and riders were hired to gallop around Broadway outfitted in Klan hoods and robes. To head off negative publicity, Thomas Dixon, vocal white supremacist and author of the novel and play on which *Birth* was based, wrote to his former school chum Woodrow Wilson and arranged for a White House screening. Griffith biographer Richard Schickel says he couldn't track down how the famous "history written with lightning" quote came to be attributed to the president, but one can imagine Dixon's good-old-boy hand in it. Private screenings were held as well for members of Congress, SCOTUS, and the press.

According to Dick Lehr's 2014 book *The Birth of a Nation*, which details the movement against the film, the big push came in Boston, cradle of

American Abolitionists and hometown to Monroe Trotter, a Harvard graduate, newspaper editor, and civil rights activist who led the charge. Griffith knew Boston was a test city and hired Pinkertons to find out what locals had planned. In the courts and in the press, the director stood on free speech ground, joining playwrights, novelists, and artists then chipping away at states' stifling censorship laws. Boston's censorship board sided with Griffith, cutting the NAACP's preview screening ticket allotment from sixteen viewers down to two, one of which had to go to a white person. The show went on, as did protests.

Opposition peaked when Monroe Trotter brought two hundred people to a screening at Boston's Tremont Theatre. The theater manager decided to admit whites only and told Black patrons the shows were sold out. A few slipped in and one launched a stinky egg at the screen. Lehr tells us the crowd outside swelled to two thousand, with ten police in uniform, another sixty in plainclothes inside the theater, and one hundred others stashed outside. The police overreacted, as they can do, storming the protesters, with one cop punching Trotter in the face. Trotter had been to jail once before, serving a month for disrupting a meeting over what he saw as a conciliatory response to Jim Crow. That time, he claimed free speech and lost.

That censorship was a problematic approach was acknowledged within the NAACP. Even as the Supreme Court had already ruled that past February that movies, as a business, are not protected by free speech, the leadership wasn't entirely comfortable in appearing to oppose the First Amendment. The effort had apparently failed anyway; censors who insisted on cuts did so because of the assaults on white female virtue rather than its odious

portrayals of slavery's real victims. Most censors let the film go with minor trims, and Trotter publicly doubted whether Griffith bothered to comply after seeing what continued to play in theaters. He also pointed out that if the film had portrayed Irish citizens similarly the city's mayor would have found a way to stop its release.

Birth ran thirty weeks in Boston alone and tickets kept selling and reviews kept raving as the film opened across the country. Profit estimates range as high as \$60 million (in 1915 dollars), including a personal fortune for a New England distributor named Louis B. Mayer, making *Birth* part of the foundational bedrock for the Hollywood studio system to come. Griffith had his long-sought name recognition, the movies had a language, and the industry a strong profit-motive to repeat itself.

The NAACP tried to raise bank for *Lincoln's Dream* in response to *Birth*, but they realized they weren't going to be able to match the scale and scope of Griffith's achievement in a timely way and the project was abandoned. As a countermeasure, the organization distributed a forty-seven page pamphlet, *Fighting a Vicious Film*, which illuminates a bright side: a stunning growth in NAACP membership, which swelled from three thousand to ten thousand over the course of the protests. Of course, the KKK also had a recruitment tool.

Independents also emerged in its wake, creating a whole new kind of cinema, Black stories made for Black audiences, but when sound arrived the expensive new technology stymied building on their own bedrock. For generations, Hollywood studios wrote off Black voices, when it suited them, while *Birth* remained forever available for revivals.

Abridged from an article first published in 2015 as "Kicking and Screaming" on Fandor's editorial pages.



SALOMÉ

MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT BY THE MATTI BYE ENSEMBLE

DIRECTED BY CHARLES BRYANT AND ALLA NAZIMOVA, USA, 1922

CAST Alla Nazimova, Mitchell Lewis, Rose Dione, and Nigel De Brulier PRODUCTION Nazimova Productions PRINT SOURCE Lobster Films

The image of Salomé as a Biblical temptress with John the Baptist's head on a platter has stirred artists' imaginations for centuries, from Titian and Caravaggio to Oscar Wilde and Richard Strauss, and from Gloria Swanson descending the stairs in *Sunset Blvd.* to Rita Hayworth's fiery dance of seduction in 1953's *Salomé*. One hundred years ago it also inspired actress Alla Nazimova to create what has come down to us as a legendary piece of silent-film art. Made in 1922, it still seems avant-garde today.

Born Adelaida Leventon in 1879 in the Crimean resort of Yalta, Nazimova studied to be a violinist but fell in love with the theater. Contrary to legend, she played only minor roles at the Moscow Art Theater but took from it a lifelong devotion to Stanislavski's method, exploring each character through her personal experience and then making it her own. When she came to New York with a touring company in 1905 and performed in Russian, audiences were transfixed. After learning English—in just six months—she went on to hold audiences spellbound in plays by Ibsen and Chekhov, inspiring generations of American playwrights and actors, from Eugene O'Neill to Tennessee Williams and the Lunts to Laurette Taylor. She came to be considered on a par with stage legends Sarah Bernhardt and Eleonora Duse.

Inevitably, Hollywood rolled out the red carpet. After her debut in Herbert Brenon's *War Brides* (1916), Metro signed Nazimova at a record-breaking \$13,000 per week. She embraced the California sunshine, became a vegetarian, and built a Spanish-style estate in the Hollywood Hills, complete with a swimming pool and lush gardens, dubbing it "The Garden of Alla" (later famous as a hotel with bungalows populated by celebrities). Around 1919 her box-office power started to wane; she retaliated by decrying the Hollywood scenarios on offer as "kindergartenish." By 1920 she was determined to gain full artistic control over her films and left Metro to go independent, producing her own films with her own money. Rarely a good idea. She reportedly lost \$400,000 on *Salomé* alone, equivalent to more than \$6.6 million today.

Oscar Wilde's one-act play *Salomé* of 1891 seems an obvious choice for Nazimova. Originally written (in French) and intended for Sarah Bernhardt, it first found fame in English as a printed text, illustrated by the subversive enfant terrible of the fin-de-siècle art world, Aubrey Beardsley, whose meticulous black-and-white drawings can still produce shock and awe. Nazimova and designer Natacha Rambova had already drawn on Beardsley's style for their 1921 collaboration *Camille*, which mixed Art Nouveau and Japonisme. Made the following year, *Salomé* elegantly combines Beardsley-style visuals with elements from Sergei Diaghilev's Ballet Russes (also echoing its performance style).

Nazimova and Rambova set out to elevate the movies by creating a Gesamtkunstwerk, a “total work of art,” uniting design, staging, and gesture to achieve a kind of silent ballet. They worked together on the sets and costumes and whittled down Wilde’s flowery original text to a series of shortened intertitles, dispensing altogether with Herod’s long speeches. It was left to the visuals and acting to convey the story, dominated by Nazimova playing Salomé as an impetuous, headstrong fourteen-year-old girl. At the time the actress was nearing forty-three, but she almost pulls it off with her puerile demeanor and Charles Van Enger’s artful camerawork. With such dominant personalities involved in the production, there was little left for credited director Charles Bryant to do. A British actor whose claim to fame was posing as Nazimova’s husband, he is believed to have made minimal contribution to the film—its true director was Nazimova.

In addition to Nazimova’s charismatic performance (her eyes are mesmerizing), *Salomé’s* most memorable attractions are the costumes and sets. Money was no object, with Rambova ordering rich lamé, silk, and satin direct from Paris. Some of the headgear is astonishing. Nazimova’s first costume is particularly notable: a short dark lamé tunic topped by an extraordinary headdress with small globes that shimmer and bobble with her every move. (It may still exist. An online image from 2015 reveals it to be a sort of knitted wig-like cap, seemingly embellished with large freshwater pearls mounted on coiled yarn.) Her second main ensemble is for the famous “Dance of the Seven Veils” sequence: a striking straight white wig, a short white tunic, and a voluminous sheer white veil. For both tunics Rambova commissioned a tire company to create the foundation garment, an ingenious rubber body sheath that gave Nazimova not only a

youthful figure but a posture that still allowed her to move with grace. Nazimova’s third principal costume is a sweeping cloak with a swirling Art Nouveau pattern, worn with a chic satin turban. This ensemble breaks the youthful illusion, making her appear womanly, quite in line with the drama’s climax, as the princess who embraces the prophet’s head. Two other incredible headdresses appear in fantasy sequences: a peacock headdress and a creation of pearls and egret feathers worthy of a Ziegfeld revue. Salomé’s costume changes are integrated into the action, shielded by a formation of female attendants wearing wide-shouldered stiff black capes punctuated by stylized floral designs, a free adaptation of one of Beardsley’s original illustrations.

Salomé was filmed in January and February of 1922 at Hollywood’s Brunton Studios on Melrose Avenue, near present-day Paramount. Its world was created on one big indoor stage, closed to visitors, and divided by a sheer curtain into two big sets. The look of the opening banquet scene was straightforward, with long tables and crowds of characters. The visual heart of the film, however, is found in the more detailed spaces of the terrace beyond, where most of the plot’s important action takes place. The stylized Beardsley-esque Art Nouveau background of the cistern where John the Baptist is held is an undulating metal screen with flowers and tendrils. It is especially striking, fronted as it is by the cage’s curved bars. In a bit of inspired acting, Nazimova’s Salomé swings on the bars like a child and inquisitively peers down into the light.

The film wouldn’t be the great accomplishment it is without the sensitive, atmospheric camerawork and effects of Charles Van Enger and his assistant Paul Ivano. They faced a particularly difficult challenge in creating the shadow of the Angel of Death that flutters on occasion over Salomé and

Jokanaan (as John the Baptist is called in Wilde’s play). The Moon is another visual portent, first seen entrancing Salomé with its full clear light, then later transformed into a blood moon obscured by clouds, foreshadowing the prophet’s execution. The film also makes striking use of the pool of light in the cistern, which abruptly disappears when Jokanaan is executed, only to shine eerily from the shield that transports his (unseen) head to Salomé.

The distributor kept the film under wraps for months, during which it reportedly was toned down. (Contemporary reviewers unanimously declared Salomé’s fateful dance decidedly unsexy.) It finally opened at the Criterion in New York in January 1923. Nazimova optimistically but unwisely booked the theater for a four-week run and spent more on advertising and publicity for the first week than the film’s total earnings. When *Salomé* went into general release that February, Nazimova appealed to exhibitors not to cut

or tamper with her film and to present it with a specially prepared score using themes from Debussy’s *Prélude à l’après-midi d’un faune*. But despite big ads featuring prestige quotes from the critics and some beautiful artwork posters and lobby cards, the film died at the box office, and Nazimova Productions folded. She must have taken comfort, at least, from some of the New York reviews, among them Robert E. Sherwood’s assessment that it was “the most extraordinarily beautiful picture that has ever been produced.” He went on to say, “*Salomé* possessed many dramatic defects, but as a spectacle for the eye, it was absolutely superlative.” The defects remain; but it still stands as the 1920s American art film par excellence, a daring experiment that can still enthrall with its imaginative design and Nazimova’s hypnotic presence.

— CATHERINE A. SUROWIEC



Alla Nazimova (right)

SALOMANIA

Salomé's Twenty-Century Run

BY SHARI KIZIRIAN

SHE wasn't even named in the Bible, a mere tool for helping her mother Herodias rid of an enemy, but she was still seized on by all Christendom as a teenaged temptress, dancing her famous dance and claiming the very first head on a platter. Later that first century Flavius Josephus, a Jewish freedom fighter who chronicled his people's struggles against the Roman Empire, gave us her name, without any mention of a dance that so pleased a lustful tyrant. No matter—as reverence grew around John the Baptist's martyrdom, especially with the Crusades' seemingly endless sequels (not to mention all the beheading), Salomé's story became increasingly salacious, overtaking the spotlight while Herod's repulsive hankering faded into the background.

Fast-forward to the 12th century's famous epic poem *Ysengrimus*, in which Nivardus from Ghent takes a detour in his lengthy animal fable to describe Salomé's attempt to kiss John's decapitated head. In a short passage he conjures the iconic image of gruesomely unrequited love that not only inspired popular songs in celebration of the Feast of St. John during the Middle Ages but also countless artists to come. Even disembodied, John the Baptist spurns her, flying up into the air to escape her lips. Nivardus calls her Herodias, as often happened, but it's clear whom he means in the passage's final line: "Unrivaled as a dancer now and evermore."

Italian Renaissance painters depicted her in tableau after tableau, her conquest resting there on a plate. She often looks away from it, or gazes out, disturbingly aware of us, as in Sebastiano del Piombo's 1510 portrait of a sullen teenager giving us the side-eye. Titian and Caravaggio used the opportunity to insert their likenesses in the frame—among the famous self-portraits "en decapité"—which rather taints Titian's choice to use his daughter as the model for his 1515 *Salomé* with Herod's incestuous sin. Artemisia Gentileschi painted Salomé in a rare pose, looking directly at what she's done, possibly the earliest depiction of our antiheroine in control.

Obsession with her image crescendoed in the late 19th century, coinciding as it did with the era's rampant Orientalism. Heinrich Heine, Flaubert, Mallarmé, Joris-Karl Huysmans, and Oscar Wilde's own brother William are among those who wrote of the Salomé myth, and scholar of the art and literature of the period Rosina Neginsky counts nearly three thousand portraits of the young blood-lusting dancer that the century also left behind. In one, a radiant, slightly disheveled young woman sits on a bench, comfortably barefooted and bare-shouldered, a clean tray and sheaved knife resting on her lap, a pleased smile on her lips. Painted by Henri Regnault in 1870, it was the first to omit John from the picture, Neginsky says, starting "a new tradition in the history of the femme fatale in art."

True obsession belongs to Gustave Moreau, the French Symbolist who painted her an astonishing 150 times. It was his 1876 *L'Apparition* that caught Wilde's eye in Paris where he wrote the play that launched "Salomania." Moreau's Salomé shimmers, captured mid-step, with John the Baptist's halo-encircled head suspended mid-air and bloody before her, Herodias and Herod shoved off to the side. Aubrey Beardsley revisits this same moment in his illustrations for Wilde's play, depicting a fabulously

des Arts. Maud Allan performed her *Vision of Salomé* for King Edward VII at Marienbad in 1907, earning her a two-week run at London's Palace Theatre, which was then held over for eighteen months. Lower-brow Salomés were in such demand that the New York Theatre opened a special Salomé school on its rooftop in 1907 to supply vaudeville's stages. One Broadway actress was so indignant at these replicating Salomés she wrote to President Teddy Roosevelt to warn of their "pernicious" spread.

"a new tradition in the history of the femme fatale in art"

draped Salomé mid-pas de deux with the prophet en decapité, nary a spectator around. Wilde's one-act tragedy, which opened in Berlin in 1902 in a Max Reinhardt production, inspired composer Richard Strauss to immediately begin writing his landmark opera, which took thirty-eight curtains calls at its December 1905 premiere in Dresden. When it was staged at the Met a little more than a year later, it scandalized New York's robber-baron class, who were so appalled by soprano Olive Fremstad's "fondling of the severed head" that no reboot was attempted for nearly thirty years. Squeamish Met donors, however, had little power over what was coming.

"An entire industry, under the banner of Salomania," writes scholar Lois Cucullu of early 20th century permutations of the myth, "attracted and produced willing converts on and off stage and screen." Butterfly dancer Loïe Fuller had already recast her wings as veils at her 10 p.m. show of *Salomé* at the Comédie-Parisienne in 1895, but flopped, until 1907 when she donned 4,500 feathers only to take them completely off for the very well-received *La Tragédie de Salomé* at Théâtre

Nevertheless she endured, performed in varying degrees of gore and titillation by Lina Munte, Mata Hari, Ida Rubinstein, Lyda Borelli, Theda Bara, Tamara Karsavina, Stacia Napierkowska, Nazimova, and countless international others. Gloria Swanson played her twice, the second time for just a few indelible moments in *Sunset Blvd.* Hollywood exhausted her in endless variations, once turning her into John's would-be savior in a 1953 version starring Rita Hayworth. But she seems ever ready for her close-up, even from behind the thinnest of veils (hello, *American Beauty*).

Salomé actually lived. She married (twice), had children, became queen of Roman vassal states in Armenia Minor and the Beqaa Valley, and had her face stamped on a coin, her only surviving contemporary depiction. Or maybe not. Rosina Neginsky casts doubt on Salomé's origin story, disputing whether she was old enough to be *that* stepdaughter of Herod. But about the Dance of the Seven Veils at the king's birthday bash Neginsky is unequivocal: "It is unthinkable and unimaginable that she would perform any kind of dance, either as a child or as a young girl."



PENROD AND SAM

MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT BY DONALD SOSIN WITH FRANK BOCKIUS

DIRECTED BY WILLIAM BEAUDINE, USA, 1923

CAST Ben Alexander, Joe Butterworth, Eugene Jackson, Joe McCray, Buddy Messinger, Bobby Gordon, Gertrude Messinger, Newton Hall, and Cameo **PRODUCTION** J.K. McDonald Productions **PRINT**

SOURCE Library of Congress

PRECEDED BY BABY PEGGY IN THE KID REPORTER WITH WILLIAM LEWIS ON PIANO

Penrod and Sam is a series of vignettes about a typical white American boy, his best pal, and the neighborhood kids who join him in playing Army games and exercising their vivid imaginations. There's a mean next-door neighbor with an equally nasty father, a cute girl who lives across the street, and a playful dog.

This nostalgic view of boyhood is derived from Booth Tarkington's best-selling collection of short stories *Penrod* and its sequels, which were regarded almost as highly as Mark Twain's yarns about Huckleberry Finn and Tom Sawyer. Tarkington was one of America's most celebrated citizens in the early 20th century, a prolific author who won the Pulitzer Prize on two separate occasions (for *The Magnificent Ambersons* and *Alice Adams*), although he is little read or remembered today.

In 2019, the Library of America attempted to remedy that situation by publishing a Tarkington anthology. That prompted literary lion Robert Gottlieb to pen an insightful essay titled "The Rise and Fall of Booth Tarkington" for *The New Yorker*. He writes, "From the moment the first of the *Penrod* stories appeared, in 1913, they were overwhelmingly popular, and when the first batch

was published in book form it was a big best-seller, and went on selling into the thirties and forties.

"The material was close at hand—not only in Tarkington's memories of his own happy boyhood but in the exploits of his three nephews as he lovingly observed them. He was paid thousands of dollars for each story as it appeared: the grand house that he and [wife] Susanah built in Kennebunkport was often fondly referred to as 'the house that Penrod built.' Tarkington also enjoyed the countless letters he received as whole classrooms across the country were assigned to write to him. His favorite: 'Teacher told us we must each write you a letter and she will send the best one. Well, how are you? Yours truly.'"

Seen today, the *Penrod and Sam* movie adaptation resembles nothing so much as an *Our Gang* comedy of the silent era. Producer Hal Roach always said the inspiration for his long-running series of comedy shorts was watching some neighborhood kids fighting over a stick outside his office window. When he realized how long they had held his attention he pursued the idea of developing a series of comedy shorts that are still enjoyed today. The fact that *Penrod and Sam* has an integrated cast of children, a lively dog,



and a dose of slapstick humor only furthers the resemblance. One of its cast members, billed here as Gene Jackson, subsequently joined the *Our Gang* ensemble as Eugene “Pineapple” Jackson and went on to a long career that extended into television in the early 1990s. Gertrude Messinger, who plays Penrod’s girlfriend, wound up at the Roach studio in 1930 in *The Boy Friends*, a comedy series best described as *Our Gang* grown up. She even married costar Dave Sharpe in real life. Her brother Buddy, who plays the hero’s nemesis in *Penrod and Sam*, was a busy young actor in the silent era and appeared in bit parts throughout the 1930s. He later moved behind the camera and worked as an assistant director and second unit director with credits as late as 1963.

Penrod is played by twelve-year-old Ben Alexander, a busy and likable child actor who was directed by Cecil B. DeMille (with Mary Pickford in *The Little American*) and D.W. Griffith (in *Hearts of the World*) during the teens and never stopped working, earning a sizable role in *All Quiet on the Western Front* and breezing through the transition to talkies. He also kept busy as an actor and announcer on radio in the 1940s and early ‘50s.

For viewers of a certain age he will be best remembered as Joe Friday’s partner Frank Smith on Jack Webb’s television series *Dragnet*. Penrod’s older sister (a small, thankless role) is portrayed by Mary Philbin, who, two years later, gained immortality as Christine opposite Lon Chaney in *The Phantom of the Opera*.

Director William Beaudine’s experience working with kids and staging slapstick scenes made him an ideal choice to pilot this

feature. Beaudine had an unusual Hollywood career by any standards. Born in 1892, he broke into the business as a prop boy at the Biograph studio in 1909 and in time was recruited as an actor and director in those early, anything-goes days of moviemaking. He was one of many future notables who served as an assistant to D.W. Griffith in the creation of his epic feature films *The Birth of a Nation* and *Intolerance*.

His economic, no-frills approach to the job of directing propelled him up the ladder of success. He directed Mary Pickford in two of her starring vehicles, *Little Annie Rooney* (1925) and *Sparrows* (1926), which represented the pinnacle of his career. In the mid-1930s he moved to England and made a number of features there (including a “quota quickie” that was a favorite of film historian William K. Everson’s, *Mr. Cohen Takes a Walk*), but when he returned to Hollywood he had trouble landing top assignments. For reasons that remain unclear he was relegated to B pictures and never escaped from that domain, churning out scores of undistinguished programmers starring everyone from Bela Lugosi to the Bowery Boys. When television came along, his reputation for efficiency

made him a mainstay on filmed series such as *Racket Squad*, *Lassie* (for which he directed eighty episodes!), and the “Spin and Marty” serial that was part of Walt Disney’s *Mickey Mouse Club*. He returned to familiar territory in the mid-1960s with the low-budget features *Jesse James Meets Frankenstein’s Daughter* and *Billy the Kid vs. Dracula*. He continued working right up to the time of his death in 1970.

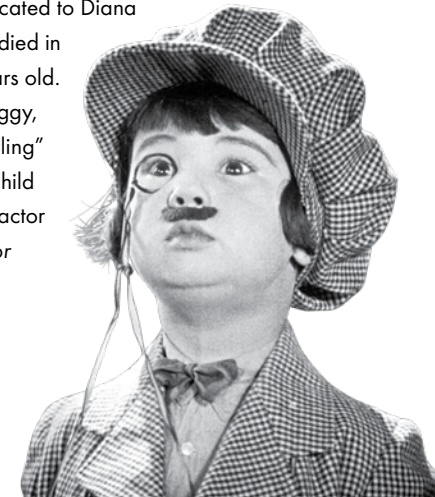
Beaudine revisited *Penrod* when Warner Bros. produced a talkie version of this feature in 1931 starring Leon Janney and Frank Coghlan Jr. The studio then commissioned a series of two-reel short subjects from its Vitaphone auxiliary and called upon the characters yet again in 1938 to spotlight its discoveries Billy and Bobby Mauch, the identical twins who starred with Errol Flynn in a 1937 adaptation of Mark Twain’s *The Prince and the Pauper*.

An important footnote regarding the film, whose intertitles are derived from Tarkington’s text, is best detailed by Robert Gottlieb: “The naïve charm and the fun of the Penrod stories are still palpable, but they are ruined for us today by the argot that spills from the mouths of the two African-American brothers who are pals of Penrod and the other boys who play in the back yards and alleyways and sheds behind the white boys’ homes. The names of the brothers, I’m afraid, are Herman and Verman, and although they are on terms of total equality with the other boys, their language sounds like the worst kind of vaudeville blackface impersonation ... How ironic all this is, given that from the start of his career Tarkington was singled out and praised for his affectionate interest in, and sympathy for, what he carefully called ‘Negroes.’ No matter: this material is utterly unbearable today.”

— LEONARD MALTIN

THE KID REPORTER

Restored from a French- and German-language print held by the British Film Institute, this 1923 Century Studio comedy features a four-year-old Baby Peggy spoofing *The Cub Reporter*, a feature released earlier that year starring Douglas Fairbanks’s former stunt man Richard Talmadge. Adorable Baby Peggy gets all the action here, of course, challenging her editor to let her cover a big story then disguising herself as a man (complete with monocle and moustache) when he doesn’t. Diana Serra Cary, the real-life Baby Peggy, wrote for 2005’s Pordenone film festival that her character is more than mere comic fodder, calling her “a surreptitious symbol and role model for the growing female work force ... beginning to invade America’s business world.” She also recalls in her notes that the tall Blanche Payson who plays a cop in the film was formerly of the L.A. police and wore her old uniform for the shoot, but mostly she remembers the painful bits of production, including the hours of practice it took before she could securely wear the monocle while being held upside-down and thrown out a window. The mansion in the film belonged to director Frank Borzage, a close friend of the film’s director (Alf Goulding), and the motorboat scene—with Peggy riding out to the open sea—was shot at San Pedro Harbor south of Los Angeles while the rowboat scenes were shot in Echo Park. This screening is dedicated to Diana Serra Cary who died in 2020 at 101 years old. Turn to “Baby Peggy, Everybody’s Darling” for more on the child star turned child-actor advocate. —Editor



THE INCORRIGIBLES

BY NORA FIORE

WITH PORTRAYALS RANGING FROM SLAPSTICK TO SORROWFUL, THESE CHALLENGING CUTIES UPSET THE WELL-ORDERED LIVES OF ADULTS AND SOMETIMES REVEAL THE LESS SUGAR-COATED SIDE OF CHILDHOOD.

THE PRECOCIOUS PRANKSTERS

As early as 1895, the Lumière brothers seized on the cinematic potential of a mischievous youngster. In *L'Arroseur Arrosé*, the boy steps on the hose prompting the clueless gardener to stare into the nozzle. While the gamin holds his pose, the audience savors the suspense, bracing for the punch line, and becomes complicit in the prank. Alice Guy's *The Glue* showcases a puckish child performance as the boy gleefully slathers glue from an abandoned pot on stairs, a bench, and a bicycle seat. His droll, frenzied movements and bouncy laughter augur the chuckles to come.

THE HOUSEHOLD PESTS

Bratty bourgeois offspring simultaneously amuse with their naughtiness while evoking sympathy for their harried caregivers. Harold Lloyd's two-reeler *I Do* bills its children as The Distraction and The Annoyance. In one relatable gag, babysitter Harold piles toys into a basket while, behind his back, The Distraction flings them onto the messy floor at the same pace. As one continually undoes the other's work, the film suggests the Sisphyean nature of parenting.

In *Helen's Babies* from 1924, best-selling childcare guru and bachelor Edward Everett Horton gets a reality check when his sister entrusts him with her two unruly daughters. The feature harnesses the star power of Baby Peggy who milks bits of business for laughs, and for grown-ups' horror. First, she ruins



her uncle's pristine starched collars by rolling them, cramping them into a box, then stomping on them. Later, balancing on a sink, she lathers her face and prepares to "shave" with a straight razor. Her bright-eyed absorption and expert timing delight the child within, but the risks she takes strike fear into the heart of any responsible adult.

THE UPPER-CLASS UPSTARTS

Unlike cheerfully calamitous household pests, these privileged problem children act out to vent their loneliness and frustration. In both *Poor Little Rich Girl* and *Gribiche*, lengthy sequences of the children's daily routines convey the airless rigidity that drives them to rebel. Pickford's titular *Poor Little Rich Girl* rejoices in destroying the trappings of wealth. Refusing to apologize to a snobbish tattletale, she throws one of her cathartic tantrums and stomps off to her room. Animated "I hate her!" text flows from the keyhole. Still fuming, she tosses



her clothes out the window, and a cascade of expensive dresses drift to the street below. Adopted by a rich do-gooder, the self-assured, streetwise Gribiche refuses to be fully tamed. He throws his pajamas, rides his tutor like a donkey, and rushes at the servants. Hiding out in the garage, Gribiche explores the undercarriage of a car. In the strangely cozy embrace of a fender and two jacks, he happily tinkers away, getting oil all over him. *Gribiche* parodies upper-class sentimentalization of working-class kids; his benefactress recasts the boy as an *Oliver Twist* type in her fabricated flashbacks. While she displays him as a curiosity, Gribiche stuffs himself to the bulging point with cookies, choking off his feelings with the newly available bounty.

THE RAUCOUS RINGLEADERS

The boys in *Penrod and Sam* and *I Was Born, But...* live according to codes that both mimic and disrupt adult affairs. Cocky and charismatic, Penrod is a freckled, prepubescent patriarch who delights in commanding his underlings and tormenting his enemies until a real-world real estate deal leaves the little lord landless. Redeemed by floods of tears over his dead dog, a grief-stricken Penrod motivates his father to buy back his kingdom so he can return to his regularly scheduled reign of terror.

Yoshi and Keiji's anarchist streak in *I Was Born, But...* hurls a deeper rebuke at the adult world.

Watching their father mug for the boss in home movies, the boys scowl at the screen, exchanging knowing looks. In contrast to the laughter around them, the brothers' grim intensity captures the unnerving judgment that children can pass on embarrassing parents. Ramping up to their hunger strike, the pair double the impact of their disapproval with echoed glances and movements. They fling sweaters, toss books, scream, jump, and stand like a two-man hit squad ready to crush their father's ego with merciless questions and truths. Once Yoshi escalates into a tantrum, father ditches the last of his dignity and spansks him. This debasing confrontation portends an adulthood filled with hierarchical humiliations. The shaken father even wonders, "Do you think they'll lead the same sorry lives we have?"

THE UNFORTUNATE SONS

The troubled boys in *Poil de Carotte*, *The Kid*, and *Arrest Warrant* mirror the hardships of their tense upbringings. Loathed by his mother, the *Poil de Carotte* of Julien Duvivier's 1925 adaptation has developed into a shaggy, awkward preteen, unlike his two respectably rotten siblings. Raised in poverty by the Tramp, Jackie Coogan's sweet-faced urchin of *The Kid* displays keen survival instincts in the form of criminal tendencies. He shatters windows as a setup for the Tramp's glazier racket, snaps into a cutesy act to fool a cop, and conks interfering social workers with a heavy hammer—all with precocious skill. Pint-sized comrade Mitia in *Arrest Warrant* ferociously flails and kicks at the soldiers who invade his home, break his toys, and haul away his mother. Undaunted by the pompous arresting officer, he defiantly sticks out his tongue. Despite his bravado, Mitia later becomes a victim, destined to be raised by a traitor. These marginalized boys make us wonder which is truly incorrigible: problem children or the cruel world that molds them.

Baby Peggy, Everybody's Darling

by Mary Mallory

Known to adoring fans across the country as the scene-stealing, doe-eyed moppet who solved mysteries, spoofed movie stars, piloted miniature trains, and survived shipwrecks and roaring flames, Baby Peggy (born Peggy-Jean Montgomery) performed in more than 150 films, both two-reel comedies and features, many of which earned as much at the box office as films by comedy superstar Charlie Chaplin, as well as made her a millionaire. Century Comedies dubbed the child actor the "The Baby Bernhardt" in advertising and distributed sheet music called *That's My Baby* to spread Baby Peggy's name far and wide.

Born October 29, 1918, in San Diego, California, the pint-sized Peggy stumbled into a movie career when her mother Marian accompanied a friend to watch filmmaking at Century Studios. Discovered by director Fred Fishback (né Fischback) after becoming separated from her mom, the self-possessed, well-behaved eighteen-month-old so impressed him she was signed to a movie contract the next day.

Peggy quickly charmed audiences with her expressive face, infectious spirit, and cute-as-a-button looks. First

paired with comic hams in slapstick two-reelers, she demonstrated great chemistry and potent box-office appeal after an on-screen pairing with an energetic terrier named Brownie the Wonder Dog in films such as *Pals* (1921), *Brownie's Little Venus* (1921), and *Circus Clowns* (1922).

Over the next two years, Baby Peggy's popularity skyrocketed, whether performing with her canine sidekick or headlining comedy shorts on her own. In 1923, *Photoplay* magazine called her "not one of your curled and frilled starlets, but a bobbed, banged, comical child of three, with more humor in one diminutive finger than grown-up luminaries have in ten manicured digits."

Century Comedies even loaned the talented tot to renowned director Marshall Neilan for the features *Penrod* (1922) and *Fools First* (1922). Peggy's fame was so widespread that she appeared as herself in the 1923 Paramount film *Hollywood*, sprinkled with cameos by many of the industry's top stars.

The adorable movie star demonstrated her acting chops toplining comedies as she outgrew her terrible twos, displaying quicksilver emotions, a precocious personality, and excellent mimicry skills parodying Hollywood

royalty like Rudolph Valentino and Pola Negri. Little flapper Peggy brought understated charm and flair to everything from a smooth-as-silk, efficient bellhop in *Tips* (1922), a saucy señorita and a fearless matador in her dual role for *Carmen Jr.* (1923), and a rock solid Canadian Royal Mountie in *Peg o' the Mounted* (1924). The newly restored *The Kid Reporter* (1923), playing this year, demonstrates the physicality and subtle scene-stealing skills of a talented performer.

The tiny titan perhaps earned her greatest reviews after turning to features when Universal signed her to a \$1.5 million contract to appear in the studio's pricier Jewel productions. *Exhibitors Herald* called Baby Peggy "irresistible throughout" her first starring feature, *The Darling of New York* (1923), and found the four-year veteran delightful in *Captain January* (1924), calling her a "little Mary Pickford" whose performance "is one of the marvels of the cinema." The mischievous sprite even stole *Helen's Babies* (1924) from "It" girl Clara Bow and double-take specialist Edward Everett Horton.

While appearing the envy of every little girl, Baby Peggy's troubled life offscreen revealed a darker, heartbreaking story. A child in name only, she grew up too fast, surviving harsh working conditions, long hours, and performing her own dangerous stunts. She was controlled by her domineering father Jack Montgomery, cowboy star Tom Mix's stunt double, who resented the success of his talented baby daughter. Her greedy parents also squandered her fortune, purchasing a luxurious mansion, flashy automobiles, and fancy clothes for themselves instead of investing it to secure her future. Peggy found her career over by age seven after her father cancelled her contract with Principal Productions

producer Sol Lesser in 1925 during a petulant rage.

Baby Peggy supported her family through punishing vaudeville tours over the next several years, only to see her father's stepfather abscond with her first fortune, before her own father lost her second one to poor investments during the Great Depression. Turning to demeaning extra work in 1930s movies, Peggy finally escaped her parents by marrying performer Gordon Ayres and working a variety of odd jobs.

A true survivor, Peggy eventually was able to repair some of the emotional damage and build a better life for herself. She turned to the Catholic Church for spiritual sustenance and changed her name to Diana Serra. She found happiness with second husband Robert "Bob" Cary and their son Mark and turned to writing as a way to reconcile her difficult past and then put it to use helping others. Observant and wise, Cary used her unique insight to shed light on the plight of overworked, underpaid stunt-performers and exploited child stars in the early film industry in her books *The Hollywood Posse* and *Hollywood's Children*. Her engrossing autobiography *What Ever Happened to Baby Peggy?* chronicles her difficult silent film days before finally achieving peace as an adult.

In later life, Cary traveled to film festivals across the world discussing her books and introducing films. As the last remaining silent star, she brought the era alive, regaling moviegoers with her colorful behind-the-scenes stories. Cary also reintroduced Baby Peggy to appreciative new audiences, rediscovering fame for herself as an actress as well as an adept writer and historian. With her death at the age of 101 in 2020, the living memory of silents comes to a close.





PREM SANYAS

**MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT BY CLUB FOOT HINDUSTANI
FEATURING PANDIT KRISHNA BHATT**

DIRECTED BY FRANZ OSTEN AND HIMANSHU RAI, INDIA-GERMANY, 1925

CAST Himanshu Rai, Seeta Devi, Sarada Ukil, Rani Bala, and Profulla Roy **PRODUCTION** Great Eastern Film Corporation and Emelka Film Company **PRINT SOURCE** British Film Institute

In March 1926, while India was still under colonial rule, an Indian silent feature achieved a rare feat: it screened for nine months at London's Philharmonic Hall, with the run extended for three more days at the last minute because of overwhelming demand. The film was *Prem Sanyas*, or *The Light of Asia*, a grand, spectacular telling of the story of the Buddha—his birth as a prince, his sheltered upbringing away from all traces of suffering, his marriage to the beautiful princess Gopa, and his eventual renunciation of royal life in search of enlightenment. For British viewers used to studio-shot Hollywood and European films about Asia that employed white actors in brownface, *Prem Sanyas* seemed to offer a rare, authentic glimpse of the East even as it told a mythological tale. Filmed in India with a much-touted all-Indian cast, it was an Oriental fantasy grounded in the promise of the “real.”

Yet the film was not as straightforwardly Indian as its advertisements claimed, and its purported authenticity was a careful, commercial construct that threw into stark relief the evolving contours of both the nation and its cinema in the 1920s. *Prem Sanyas* was the first of many collaborations between the Indian actor-producer Himanshu Rai and the German director Franz Osten. A wealthy Bengali from Bombay, Rai had moved to London to study law, and in the early 1920s, formed a theater

troupe called the Indian Players Company with the playwright Niranjan Pal. Inspired both by the growing nationalist or *swadeshi* movement in India, which rejected British imports in favor of domestic products, and an enterprising vision of cinema as an “International Art,” Rai aspired to make an Indian film that would find success abroad. Pal provided a script that was prime for this project: an adaptation of Sir Edwin Arnold's *The Light of Asia*, an epic poem about the life of the Buddha.

In Germany, where Rai headed to find collaborators, the film tapped into a growing fascination with India and Asian spirituality. Poet and Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore had been welcomed with overwhelming interest during his visit to Germany in 1921, reputed writers like Hermann Hesse and Bertolt Brecht were drawing on Buddhism in their work, and films like *The Yogi* (Paul Wegener, 1916) and *The Indian Tomb* (Joe May, 1921) had proved big hits at the box office. Rai succeeded in brokering a deal with Emelka Film Company in Munich, which agreed to provide equipment, laboratory services, a camera crew, and a director; Rai was to procure the locations, actors, and capital. It was a bona fide international coproduction, a rare occurrence in 1920s India.

Rai was a canny businessman with a keen understanding of Indian films as commodities not unlike “steel or wood,” for which “a demand

should be created in the International market." With *Prem Sanyas*, Rai and Osten fashioned a vision of India that played into the ethnographic zeal and exoticist appetite of the West. The film opens with documentary scenes of Indian temples, mosques, bazaars, and streets, and alternates shots of cars and oxen carts, while the intertitles describe the country as a romantic land of "many wonders and many contrasts." A group of tourists lead us into the film's fiction, setting it up explicitly as a tale told to the West. As the foreigners arrive at the banyan tree in Gaya under which the Buddha is believed to have attained enlightenment, a sage begins to narrate the story we soon see unfolding on the screen.

This tension between nonfiction and fiction—ethnography and artistry—shapes *Prem Sanyas*, reflective of the production's dual aims of nationalist image-making and cinematic excellence. The film was shot on a number of real, historic locations in Calcutta, Udaipur, Jaipur, Agra, and Benares, and, as Rai liked to emphasize in his writings and

promotional materials, it featured an all-native cast, from the starring roles to the nonprofessional extras he claimed were playing themselves. "This unique film was produced entirely in India without the aid of studio sets, artificial lights, faked-up properties or make-ups," the opening titles declared. Yet the film was also a showcase for the craft of German technicians and the opulence of Indian royalty.

While Arnold's poem, written as a response to Western materialism, covers the Buddha's early life as Prince Siddhartha and his later travels as an ascetic in equal measure, *Prem Sanyas* relegates the developments after Siddhartha's renunciation to less than a third of the film's ninety-seven-minute run time. Instead, the film revels in the glamour and grandeur of the palaces, jewels, and elephants made available to the production by the Maharajah of Jaipur, who, per the opening titles, "placed the whole of the resources of his State for the making of the picture." Filmed by Josef Wirsching and Willi Kiermeier with an Expressionist

flair for symmetry, shadows, and depth, some of the most striking scenes are of the contests that Siddhartha (played by Rai in a fine, dignified turn) participates in to win Gopa's hand in marriage. In sumptuous wide shots, we see the prince and Gopa's other suitors try to lance a leaf on

horseback and compete in games of blindfolded archery as an audience of hundreds watches on.

At a time when film acting still carried a social stigma in upper-class circles, Rai sought to give it a veneer of respectability. In contrast to the contemporary Indian director Baburao Painter, whose silent films—intended mainly for local audiences, unlike Rai's international ambitions—drew on the traditional arts and starred male wrestlers and female courtesans, Rai sought to cast well-educated and well-to-do actors from "good families." The opening titles for *Prem Sanyas* paint a picture of saintly sacrifice and idealism that parallels the narrative of the film. Each of the film's principal actors, it says, "gave up his or her career as Doctor, Lawyer, Engineer and Professor to bring about a renaissance of the Dramatic Art of India." (A 1928 *New York Times* review goes as far as to identify the cast as "high-born Hindus.") What the titles don't reveal are the limits imposed by this insistence on respectability, particularly on female roles. Rai reportedly had such great difficulty in finding a suitable actress to play Gopa that he settled on a thirteen-year-old Anglo-Indian actress, Renee Smith, who is credited in the film (and in several subsequent Rai-Osten collaborations) with a stage name drawn from Indian mythology, "Seeta Devi."

Devi's anomalous casting in this supposedly all-Indian production exemplifies the play of exoticism and realism in *Prem Sanyas*. When Siddhartha, having returned to his palace after a disillusioning tour of the kingdom, gazes at the sleeping Gopa, her image transforms into that of a poor, aged, dark-skinned woman he had encountered on the streets, compelling him to renounce his royal life. The difference in the skin tones of the two women is stark, particularly in black-and-white, and it recasts the film's contrast between artistry and authenticity

in racial terms. The domain of the royals, played by fair-skinned, noble-blooded Indians, becomes that of fantasy and cinematic craft; the domain of nonprofessional actors, real locations, and abject suffering becomes the site of ethnography. (Skin color provoked anxieties about authenticity and Indianness elsewhere in the film's making, too: Pal wrote that Osten clashed with him over Pal's choice of a light-skinned infant for the baby Siddhartha, who Osten worried might be mistaken for German.)

The diverging reception of *Prem Sanyas* in India, Britain, and Europe speaks to its cosmopolitan concoction of influences and ambitions. In Germany, the film was hailed as "a new achievement of the German film industry" and "a glory of German cinematic art," and it went on to screen in Berlin, Brussels, Budapest, Genoa, Venice, and Vienna. In Britain, *Prem Sanyas* was praised as a naturalistic marvel that "reproduced the Eastern atmosphere with absolute fidelity." And in India, the film earned critical acclaim but did poorly at the box office, with trade press calling the film "foreign" despite Indian marketing materials that minimized or elided Osten's involvement and emphasized the Indianness of the production. Indian capital was no longer available for Rai and Osten's subsequent silent features, but German and British funds flowed in: *Shiraz* (1928), a grand, romantic fable about the construction of the Taj Mahal, was produced by Emelka, and *A Throw of Dice* (1929), adapted from an episode in the *Mahabharata*, by Ufa. Both were pre-sold to British Instructional Films. Yet *Prem Sanyas* went on to become foundational to the history of Indian cinema, too. In 1936, on the strength of the success and experience gained from his silent films, Rai and his wife, the actress-producer Devika Rani, founded Bombay Talkies, one of Hindi cinema's most influential movie studios.

— DEVIKA GIRISH



Sarada Ukil (center), Himanshu Rai, and Profulla Roy



ARREST WARRANT

MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT BY THE SASCHA JACOBSEN QUINTET

DIRECTED BY HEORHII TASIN, SOVIET UKRAINE, 1926

CAST Vira Varetska, Khairi Emir-Zade, Nikolai Kutuzov, Alik Litovetskyi, Nikolai Panov, and Shorokhova

PRODUCTION All-Ukrainian Photo Cinema Administration (VUFKU) **ORIGINAL LANGUAGE TITLE**

Order na Aresht **PRINT SOURCE** Oleksandr Dovzhenko National Centre

It's yet another under-explored, under-restored arm of silent film history—Soviet Ukrainian cinema, at least the years before Oleksandr Dovzhenko began making his distinctly regional films in the late 1920s. Soviet film was, even into the 1980s, always unwittingly conflicted about its provincial cultures, torn between the official urge to homogenize them into uniform Communist art or to give in to celebrating the different ethnic identities—from Estonia to Kyrgyzstan to Yakutia—as a way to cultivate cooperation from far-flung groups with their own age-old traditions, priorities, and languages. The Ukrainians had their own state film monopoly—the VUFKU—that controlled all film production in the busy republic and operated with apparent independence from the larger Soviet bureaucracy. Scholars have noted that this initial distance from the Soviet hierarchy, which itself was in almost total disarray during the infrastructurally devastated postwar years (even Moscow didn't have a single working theater until 1921), encouraged the Ukrainians to employ mostly pre-revolutionary-era talent. So, Ukraine's film culture had, for a few years anyway, the distinctly sulfurous whiff of German Expressionism about it.

Little by little the urgent-realism Soviet style we recognize from Eisenstein, Pudovkin, and Vertov (who later made his films at VUFKU) crept in. The admixture of the two is what's embodied in Heorhii

Tasin's *Arrest Warrant* (*Order na Aresht*), a little-remembered psychological potboiler that manages to pamper revolutionary temperaments just as it stretches beyond Marxist-Leninism to both subvert narrative convention and consider the impossible position of womanhood in a militarized culture that, however ostensibly gender-neutral, remained crushingly patriarchal. It does all this in a freeform narrative tumult that favors subjectivity over clarified what's-what storytelling, employing tropes and techniques that seem, at least to modern eyes, to have been distinctly un-Soviet.

Talk about in medias res: Tasin's film may well have been clearer to Ukrainian audiences in 1926 than to us today, beginning as it does in a revolutionary municipal office mobilizing in a panic, apropos of who knows what—clearing out, we end up assuming, before the White Army gets there, which places the unmentioned year as 1918, when the Red vs. White Civil War was still raging tit-for-tat in Ukraine. In the fracas we meet Nadia (Vira Varetska), the devoted wife of studly Committee Chairman Serhii (Khairi Emir-Zade), who entrusts her with an envelope she must guard with her life. Listening and watching nearby is the shifty Valerii (Nikolai Kutuzov), whose sly demeanor immediately signals to us that there's a fly in the comradely ointment. The two men end up on the same wagon out of town, sharing a smoke; only we know something counterrevolutionary is

afoot. But wait, did one of them jump off and run back into town?

As the Whites march in, Nadia hides the envelope in a hole under brush and dumps all evidence of her husband in a pond. She and her young son are still treated to a thorough ransacking, and she is eventually arrested. Thus begins the film's meaty Act 2, in which the White intelligence officers try everything they can think of to break her down and divulge the location of the "package" they know she has. Fate is not on her side—eventually, her son's peppy dog provides the giveaway moment to prying eyes. For Nadia the interrogation is by turns subtle and brutal, sapping her will and crippling her sanity and if the early parts of the film, in their shadowy visuals and blocking, remind you far more of Fritz Lang's spy films than classic Soviet agitprop, the heart of the movie evokes lurid Germanicisms like Robert Reinert's *Nerven* (1919), Robert Wiene's *The Hands of Orlac* (1924), and two by F.W. Murnau, *Phantom* (1922) and *The Last Laugh* (1924)—not to mention G.W. Pabst's *Secrets of a Soul*, made the same year as Tasin's movie. (As vexing as it might've been in the 1920s, Tasin was an ardent Germanophile and he was also head

of the Odessa Film Studio and went on to adapt Upton Sinclair's socialist antiwar novel *Jimmie Higgins*, one of his greatest successes.) Nadia's deteriorating consciousness is conjured in a shotgun blast of montages, packed with dream imagery, fragmented memories, subliminal cuts, Pudovkinian associative edits, double exposures, careening handheld camera stumbles, even cutaways to a cat hunting and catching a mouse. Spider webs, fire, crashing ocean waves, vertigo abstractions, face-reflection distortions à la Murnau, hallucinations of her child visiting her bedside as though he were a ghost—Tasin pours on the shattered subjectivity, being as overtly Freudian as any Soviet filmmaker of the era. It verges on a German horror film. Tasin may today be most famous for scripting Vladimir Gardin's 1923 Poe-riff *A Spectre Haunts Europe*—but as the empathic bond with the heroine's plight in *Arrest Warrant* is always prioritized, Tasin's film looks forward a few years to Carl Dreyer's *The Passion of Joan of Arc*, the era's definitive take on women's experience of systematic oppression.

In its final act, *Arrest Warrant*, as Valerii and Serhii both emerge from the shadows, turns some serious narrative tables, actually deepening and

complicating each characters' motivations and ethical conundrums in ways mainstream Soviet films weren't allowed to do just a few years on. In terms of its proto-feminist focus, and the angsty romantic triangle that manifests (with a child at its centroid), the movie may well have been a precedent for Abram Room's controversial and groundbreaking *Bed and Sofa* in 1927, suggesting to us that Soviet silents, in a broad way, were more open to human complexity and contradictions to Party propaganda than we ordinarily surmise from the predominance of the established film school classics.

But perhaps even more so in Ukraine. Tasin's film explicitly critiques the prescribed Party thrust, building a narrative in which even all the devoutly Red characters are beleaguered, compromised, and in the end condemned to personal and revolutionary failure. Soviet films were often tragic, favoring martyrdom against tsarist or, later, Nazi, combatants, but Tasin's climax seethes with a tragedy carrying no revolutionary takeaway. It's as though war, and revolutionary struggle itself, is being envisioned as a lose-lose dynamic.

It's not hard to sniff out here the bitterness left in the contrails of the Ukrainian-Soviet War, which raged on the ground amid battling revolutionary factions (not just against the Whites) from 1917 to 1921 and must've left a lingering sense of ambivalence in Ukraine about the practical coherency of the Soviet experiment. With that in mind, Tasin's film can feel almost revelatory—a glimpse of a granular historical gray area into which we, as Westerners, have had precious little insight. Fittingly for a film centered on a woman's plight in a roiling man's world, everything is contingent on power, and the only certainty is betrayal.

— MICHAEL ATKINSON

OLEKSANDR DOVZHENKO NATIONAL CENTRE

As of this writing in early April, the Russian military has been beaten back from Kyiv, at least for now. On the second day of the invasion in late February, the Dovzhenko Centre, located in the Holosiivskiyi district of the city, announced in a social media post that it was closed to all activities save "vital functions," with employees and their families securing in city shelters. On March 4, the *Guardian* published a list compiled by the archive's staff of twenty modern-day Ukrainian films that could help outsiders understand what is happening to the country and offered Sergei Loznitsa's *Maidan*, about the people's uprising against a Putin puppet in 2014, available for free on its YouTube channel. Not long afterward, the center set up screens and projectors so kids taking shelter in the Kyiv subways could watch cartoons and started a series on the best of Ukrainian cinema, coordinating, where possible, with other cities, to provide distraction but also strengthening the people's connection to their culture. Despite everything, the center and its staff continued to serve their communities, demonstrating something the rest of us know intellectually but they faced every day: defending lives and lands is also a defense of all the intangible things that bind them as a nation. While proceeds from this screening will be donated to the Dovzhenko Centre, it bears noting that throughout the dire first weeks the majority of the center's social media posts consisted of simple instructions for donating to Ukraine's defense forces written across an image from Oleksandr Dovzhenko's *Earth*. In it, Yuliya Solntseva, the Moscow-born actress and the director's wife, looks out over the landscape, her jaw set in determination, a sunflower in full bloom standing sentinel beside her. —Editor





SYLVESTER

MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT BY TIMOTHY BROCK CONDUCTING THE SAN FRANCISCO SILENT MOVIE ORCHESTRA

DIRECTED BY LUPU PICK, GERMANY, 1924

CAST Eugen Klöpfer, Edith Posca, Frida Richard PRODUCTION Rex-Film PRINT SOURCE Deutsche Kinemathek

German cinema between the wars—in the wake of the Versailles Treaty and the crippling debt that came with it, the impending spike in inflation, and the trauma of military defeat—was often populated with fallen men, particularly vulnerable to the forces of modernity and inadequately equipped to navigate the new world of the postwar metropolis. The performance that Eugen Klöpfer delivers as the Husband in Lupu Pick's *Sylvester* (New Year's Eve), not unlike his earlier portrayal of the bumbling, repressed philistine in Karl Grune's *Die Strasse* (The Street, 1923), is no exception. The seeming excess of pathos-laden despair and tragic resignation in the face of a bitter decision between his dual loyalties to the Wife (Edith Posca) and the Mother (Frida Richard) reflects, as Siegfried Kracauer famously argued in his groundbreaking study *From Caligari to Hitler*, a failure in maturity of character and, by extension, a failure of the German fledgling democracy at large.

The story, written by Carl Mayer, who had collaborated with Pick on a handful of films before *Sylvester*, unfolds in the final hour of New Year's Eve. A boisterous and increasingly drunken crowd fills a low-rent tavern, where vast quantities of frothy beer and festive punch are tossed back with reckless abandon, and on the opposite side of the street, elegantly dressed members of the German upper crust waltz away the night in a glamorous hotel ballroom. Guido Seeber's camera, showing

early signs of mobility by using a tripod on rails, tracks in repeatedly on an oversized clock that anchors the illuminated town square, teeming with crowds, to indicate the approaching hour. Adjacent to the tavern is a squalid, sparsely decorated one-room flat occupied by the Husband, the Wife, and their slumbering baby whose presence, in a rickety carriage, is only intermittently felt.

At the start of the film, things look upbeat enough, with the Husband and Wife working harmoniously, in the tavern serving guests and at their home preparing for the holiday festivities. But any hopes of an intimate late-night supper together—the camera lingers on a small table bedecked with two place settings—are quickly dashed with an emotion-laden disruption posed by the arrival of the Husband's mother, first captured in haunting profile, vaguely reminiscent of the vampire's shadow climbing the staircase in F.W. Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1922), outside the frost-covered kitchen window. No need for backstory, or expository titles, as the mutual contempt of the wife and her mother-in-law is made palpable, verging at crucial junctures on outright violence. Unable to choose between the two all-or-nothing expressions of suffocating love, amplified in twin portraits hanging on the otherwise bare wall of their flat, one of the man alone with his mother and the other a photo with his wife on their wedding day, the Husband sees no other out than taking his own life.



Both Pick and his wife Posca were formally trained actors who, like many members of that generation, found their way from the theater to cinema. Similarly, *Sylvester* fits into a relatively brief, but visually significant subgenre of Weimar cinema known as the Kammerspielfilm, which took its name from its theatrical counterpart, the Kammerspiel (chamber play). These films tend to emphasize emotional and psychological intensity over elaborate, or even linear, narration—thus the complete absence of any intertitles—often set in a confined domestic space, where the smallest of gestures are legible as they are frequently drawn from the milieu of the German petite bourgeoisie.

Pick and Mayer had already produced what was widely thought to have been the earliest entry to the subgenre, *Scherben* (*Shattered*, 1921), which bore the confident subtitle “Ein deutsches Filmkammerspiel” and lay much of the groundwork for *Sylvester*. In addition, Mayer had made an international name for himself in cowriting Robert Wiene’s highly acclaimed early horror film *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920); a year later he

supplied the scenario for Pick’s horror film *Grausige Nächte* (*Nights of Terror*, 1921). All of Pick’s early films as director were made for a production company that he helped found in 1918, Rex-Film, which was folded into a separate film corporation upon *Sylvester*’s release.

Around the time of the film’s premiere at the Ufa-Theater am Kurfürstendamm on January 3, 1924, just days after New Year’s Eve, Pick commented on the scenario by Mayer, insisting that it “may well have intended to disclose brightness and darkness ... within the soul itself, that eternal alternation of light and shadow characterizing the psychological relations between human beings.” Mayer had a notable penchant for writing “instinct-possessed characters,” in Kracauer’s apt formulation, and for portraying the larger social spheres, often at odds with each other, that they represent. Much of the film, then, is less about story than about the milieu, or “Umwelt,” and about atmosphere or “Stimmung,” both rather central to the Kammerspielfilm tradition.

In Pick and Mayer’s collaboration, there is indeed “an Expressionistic taste for violent contrast,” as

Lotte Eisner points out in *The Haunted Screen*, her trenchant analysis of films of the period. In Mayer’s script, the contrast between the two primary locations could not be any clearer: “Tavern. Gloom. Smoke. Dim lighting,” he writes of the first comparatively drab, unadorned space; “Smoke. Dancing. Music. Lights” of the ballroom on the opposite side of the street (which he insists should open “in *Glanz und Licht*,” bathed in splendid light). We even catch quick glimpses of the street life, beggars hawking postcards and cigarettes, and a war cripple, propped up on a single crutch, grinding an organ, the kinds of figures that haunted the contemporary canvases of Otto Dix and Georg Grosz.

Working together with his exceptionally talented editor Luise Heilborn-Körbitz, Pick uses cross-cutting in such a way that almost prefigures the dialectical montage soon to be employed by Soviet filmmakers. Pick thus highlights the distinct social spheres and their incongruity with respect to the human tragedy taking place in their midst. In the digital 4K restoration, jointly undertaken in 2018 by the Deutsche Kinemathek and the National Film Archive of Japan, we have shots of the dark and ominous sea that form bookends to the film, and which are also intercut at particularly dramatic moments throughout. We are, however, missing additional scenes of the church cemetery and the heath that once rounded out the natural elements in the original print. Still, the juxtaposition of the ephemeral and ultimately fragile moment of euphoric celebration and breast-beating mourning chronicled in the hour leading up to the New Year with the more permanent, universal elements of nature—the pithy epigraph from the Tower of Babel story helps set the tone in this regard—adds to the tension and to the film’s overarching oppositional structure.

The German Kammerspielfilm tradition didn’t last much longer after *Sylvester*, but parts of it appear to have traveled across the Atlantic and to have reemerged in Hollywood. If one thinks, for instance, of Murnau’s *Sunrise* (1927), his stunning debut at Fox, scripted by Mayer, it’s not hard to see several striking affinities: George O’Brien’s performance of the Man reflects a similar blend of wounded masculinity, self-pity, and immaturity to Klöpfer’s depiction of both the Husband in *Sylvester* and the repressed philistine in *Die Strasse*; likewise, the stark contrast between the dull tedium of the couple’s homelife and the spectacular allure of the city—whose sets were designed by Rochus Gliese and a twenty-something Edgar G. Ulmer—helps give the film its emotional and even erotic power. Years later, a number of these core ideas and their early stylistic manifestations on screen also helped to define that remarkable cycle of American movies that came to be known as film noir.

— NOAH ISENBERG

Before the screening, Deutsche Kinemathek will be presented with the 2022 SFSFF Award for commitment to the preservation and presentation of silent cinema.

SAN FRANCISCO SILENT MOVIE ORCHESTRA

Alisa Rose (Violin I)
 Anthony Blea (Violin II)
 Darcy Rindt (Viola)
 Jessica Ivry (Cello)
 Lisa Mezzacappa (Bass)
 Sheldon Brown (Flute/Piccolo)
 Flora Espinoza (Oboe)
 Beth Custer (Clarinet)
 Chris Grady (Trumpet)
 Scott Siler (Percussion I)
 Tim DeCillis (Percussion II)
 Allison Lovejoy (Piano)



THE SCORE'S THE THING

Martin Koerber on Deutsche Kinemathek Restorations

Interview by
Marilyn Ferdinand

Film archives are replete with stories of amazing discoveries, painstaking research, and technical challenges—but perhaps none so dramatic as that of Berlin's Deutsche Kinemathek, another recipient of this year's SFSFF Award. In 1945, a Russian grenade landed in a vault housing the original negatives, nitrate prints, and other film materials that had been collected by German director Gerhard Lamprecht and blew them to bits. Fortunately, some of those films had been stored elsewhere as 16mm prints and became part of the collection when Deutsche Kinemathek opened in February 1963 under the direction of Lamprecht. Now, the Kinemathek has more than twenty thousand titles available for screening, about a thousand from the silent era. Martin Koerber, who is retiring from his position as curator of the Kinemathek, spoke with me about the archive and its restorations at this year's festival.

How was Gerhard Lamprecht instrumental not only in establishing the archive, but also in helping you with your restoration efforts?

He started as a collector when he was in his teens. And he sold his first collection to an educational institution in 1914—and he was, like, seventeen! Immediately, he started a second collection, and I think what we have is this second collection. And in many instances, this is the only surviving material—at least, that's what we thought for a long time. One of the reasons we are going back to silent films from that collection is to do better on a particular title's restoration.

In the 1950s, Lamprecht also recorded interviews with a lot of silent film people about making films in the '20s or even earlier. There are descriptions

about how they were shooting in those glass booths, what the electricians were doing, technical details. These tapes are as useful for restorations as the literature we have on the films.

Tell me a bit about the restoration of *Waxworks*.

Waxworks was one of the 16mm holdings in the Lamprecht collection and, I believe, the first film shown after the Kinemathek was founded. It must have looked absolutely terrible—black and white and probably copied to death so it looked like a woodcut, which people take by mistake for Expressionism.

Cineteca di Bologna had done a restoration in 1990s, reprinted from the BFI nitrate print. It looked gorgeous in comparison to what was known before.

When funds became available for another go at it, Bologna agreed to cooperate with us. The film was heavily abridged by the British distributor and wrongly titled in English. We have various versions of the script, but they all don't quite correspond to the film we have. We could, of course, put in the German titles from either script, but it would never be authentic. So, we decided to keep the English titles. For a lot of scenes, we had to rely on another nitrate print at the Cinémathèque Française, which is a reprint from the British nitrate, but from the period. That's also not very good. We thought this is the last moment when we can catch this because this nitrate is really going. And the rest is digital technology. I'm happy with the result. But it is only a shadow of the original film.

Aesthetically, I think there is no such thing as an Expressionist cinema. Expressionism is a painter movement before World War I, before there was cinema to speak of. *Waxworks*, *Caligari*, and films like that have Expressionist decoration because they want to make clear that the people in this film are crazy. If you see a good, original print, then you see that it was photographed completely normally. You just have zigzagging decorations. For me, that doesn't make an Expressionist film.

I understand *Sylvester* was a difficult undertaking. How did you work with that film?

We had a nitrate print, which is pretty nice but incomplete, and the Cinémathèque Française had something incomplete, but a little bit differently incomplete. The National Film Archive in Japan had a very beautiful nitrate print, without which the project could not have happened. It was out of order, but it is very complete in comparison. There is a lot of German nitrate from the period that ended up there through private collections.

In this case, the score was of the essence. The original score is actually the source for the restoration because it tells what belongs where. These scores are very carefully annotated. The music moves with the actors and the action and tells you so much that

the film cannot possibly express in terms of images. Even more in this score, there are cues every few bars because the conductor has to follow the film. We did a reshuffling of scenes based on the score.

What can you tell me about this crucial score and its composer?

Klaus Pringsheim is not a very well-known composer. He happened to be the twin brother of Katia Pringsheim, who was the wife of Thomas Mann. Young Klaus grew up in incredibly musical surroundings, decided to become a musician, and became an assistant of Gustav Mahler in Vienna. In the '20s, he became the musical director of the theaters run by Max Reinhardt in the Berlin. So, he was constantly composing music for dramatic action. He wrote only one score for a film, apparently, and that was this one. Julia Wallmüller, the restorer on this film, found Pringsheim's papers in the estate of his son in an archive in Canada. We sifted through a catalog of his typescripts and found the score listed under its English title *New Year's Eve*. We asked to see it and they sent a PDF. It was so simple.

The score was only played at the very first performance. The film was not a success and was immediately re-edited, so the score didn't fit anymore. It's a very edgy, even violent score. In the first ten bars or so, the themes are all there, condensed, and then they unfold throughout in all kinds of disguises. Since the film has no intertitles, the emotional dynamics of the characters are only hinted at through their arrangement in the space or through pantomime. Without the original score their emotions are almost incomprehensible. But through the music, it becomes just super moving.



A TRIP TO MARS

MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT BY WAYNE BARKER

DIRECTED BY HOLGER-MADSEN, DENMARK, 1918

CAST Gunnar Tolnæs, Nicolai Neiiendam, Zanny Petersen, Alf Blütecher, Svend Kornbeck, Frederick Jacobsen, and Lilly Jacobsson **PRODUCTION** Nordisk Films Kompagni **ORIGINAL LANGUAGE TITLE** *Himmelskibet* **PRINT SOURCE** Danish Film Institute

Space travel was truly a visionary concept when Jules Verne first introduced it in his 1865 novel *From the Earth to the Moon* and it continued to attract readers when H.G. Wells explored the idea further a few years later in 1901's *First Men in the Moon*. Although both authors were fascinated with science and technology, these novels were essentially outlandish adventures with elements of humor and satire. Even the first acknowledged film about an expedition into outer space—Georges Méliès's *A Trip to the Moon* (1902)—was a whimsical fantasy rather than a realistic approach to the subject. Fifteen years later, the release of the Danish film *A Trip to Mars* (*Himmelskibet*), directed by Holger-Madsen, announced a new kind of approach.

Also known as *The Ship of Heaven* and *The Sky Ship*, it is considered by many to be the first feature-length film to take the idea of interplanetary travel seriously and is an engaging mix of futuristic adventure, romantic idealism, and philosophical drama. The film's hero, Captain Avanti Planetaros (Gunnar Tolnæs), is a renowned explorer who flies off to Mars aboard the spacecraft *Excelsior* with a small team of volunteer astronauts, including a boisterous, alcoholic American who almost incites a mutiny. What they encounter on Mars is a vastly superior race that has eradicated war and aggression from its DNA and is living in harmony

with nature and each other. Will the Earth visitors pose a threat and create problems for their hosts?

A Trip to Mars was produced by Nordisk Films, founded in 1906 by theater owner Ole Olsen, who quickly built it into one of the most prolific production facilities in Europe, turning out more than a hundred movies a year by 1910. The studio's peak coincided with Denmark's Golden Age of Cinema and it achieved international success by supplying the market with a steady stream of well-made releases, especially melodramas, literary adaptations, slapstick comedies, films about white slavery, and prestige productions like *Atlantis* (1913), a large-scale disaster epic.

A Trip to Mars, written by author Sophus Michaëlis and Ole Olsen, is one of the most ambitious productions made at the tail end of the studio's heyday and a rare foray into science fiction. Nordisk had ventured into the genre's territory only once before with 1916's *Verdens Undergang* (*The Flaming Sword*), directed by August Blom, in which a passing comet threatens apocalypse.

A Trip to Mars was an unusual choice for director Holger-Madsen, who was better known for social dramas exploring themes of spirituality (*John Redmond*, *The Evangelist*, 1915) and earthbound pacifism (*Down with Weapons!*, also 1915). However, he became intrigued by what he later



described as “the thought that there might well be populated planets, where evolution had gone further than here—say Mars.”

Although *A Trip to Mars* predates more widely seen silent-era science fiction films like Jakov Protazanov’s *Aelita*, *Queen of Mars* (1924), Holger-Madsen’s epic takes a less stylized approach to what later became hallmarks of the genre—set design, special effects, and fantastical set pieces—all of which are modest in comparison with something like the visual opulence of Fritz Lang’s *Woman in the Moon* (1929). For example, *A Trip to Mars’* *Excelsior* looks more like a functional hybrid of a dirigible and a biplane than a spaceship. The interior quarters are not luxuriously imagined like Lang’s but are spartan and claustrophobic, resembling the belly of a submarine. In addition, the concept of space travel is unromanticized with Holger-Madsen accenting

the isolation, loneliness, and boredom that plague the crew members during their journey. In this way *A Trip to Mars* has more in common with modern space travel films from *Solaris* (1972) through *Ad Astra* (2019).

The most unexpected aspect of *A Trip to Mars* is the depiction of the planet as a utopian society, which looks forward to the mythical city of Shangri-La envisioned by James Hilton in his 1933 novel *Lost Horizon* and may even seem familiar to fans of Gene Roddenberry’s early *Star Trek* series. Unlike Earth, Mars is a world without war, sickness, poverty, and all the human imperfections that create strife. Their concept of death is also seen as spiritual renewal rather than something to be dreaded.

At the same time, *A Trip to Mars* is often amusing when detailing cultural differences between the Earthmen and their hosts. Welcoming Martian elders wear ceremonial head dresses and flowing

white robes that conjure wise Roman senators or an eclectic religious cult. The space explorers stand in dark contrast, tightly buttoned from head to toe into brown leather. The Martians are strictly vegetarian and baffled by Avanti’s gifts of wine and canned meat. “Meat? Dead meat? How do you procure that?” asks the Martian elder (Philip Bech). In answer, Avanti grabs his gun and blasts a bird out of the sky. Yet, the most extreme example of the gulf between the blissed-out Martians and their leather-clad visitors are brief glimpses of life back on Earth presented as a montage of gambling, lewd dancing, women drinking in nightclubs, and street crime.

Yet even 1918’s war-weary audiences were unreceptive to Olsen and Michaëlis’s pacifist fantasy. When *A Trip to Mars* premiered on February 22, 1918, it was derided by most Danish film critics as being overly earnest in its plea for peaceful coexistence. Could it be that a futuristic fantasy emphasizing peaceful coexistence over special effects and action-packed escapades was simply ahead of its time?

The male lead in *A Trip to Mars* is Norwegian-born Gunnar Tolnæs who was at the peak of his fame in 1917 thanks to his role as an Indian prince in the first installment of *The Maharajah’s Favorite Wife*, directed by Robert Dinesen, with whom he later made a sequel. The handsome Tolnæs found himself constantly cast in matinee idol romances and he longed for the more complex roles of his earlier career when he was working with prestigious Swedish directors such as Maurice Stiller and Victor Sjöström. Tolnæs never made the transition to sound films and abandoned film acting altogether in 1929. *A Trip to Mars’* Lilly Jacobsson, who appeared opposite Tolnæs in both *Maharajah* films as well, retired from the screen a few years after marrying in 1919. Her final role as Ophelia

in *Hamlet* (1921), with Asta Nielsen as a gender-bended Prince of Denmark, could be her finest performance.

One cast member from *A Trip to Mars* recognizable today is Nils Asther, who appears briefly as a fatally wounded Martian who is later resurrected from the dead. He quickly rose to fame as a leading man in Danish, Swedish, and German films before setting out for Hollywood in 1917, where his angular good looks placed him opposite top-tier talent that included Joan Crawford for 1928’s *Our Dancing Daughters* and Greta Garbo for *Wild Orchids* and *The Single Standard*, both 1929.

After the lackluster box office of *A Trip to Mars* Nordisk Films did not pursue further science-fiction projects, and with the ascendance of the Hollywood export, Nordisk’s fortunes faded throughout the 1920s. Danish cinema didn’t venture into the realm of the fantastic again until two releases that bookend the 1960s: *Reptilicus* (1961), in which a frozen prehistoric creature is awakened by scientists, and *The Man Who Thought Life* (1969), about a man with extraordinary mental powers. More recently Denmark’s filmmakers have taken on the consequences of space travel with *Aniara*, a 2018 Swedish-Danish production directed by Pella Kagerman and Hugo Lilja, in which a commercial flight to Mars is supposed to take only two weeks but becomes an eternity as the spaceship is knocked off course and lost in space. The passengers end up choosing either self-annihilation or living without hope of rescue. Such a dystopian vision stands in marked contrast to the idealism of *A Trip to Mars*, which was made at the bitter end of World War I yet comes across like a radical act of optimism.

— JEFF STAFFORD



SKINNER'S DRESS SUIT

MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT BY PHILIP CARLI

DIRECTED BY WILLIAM A. SEITER, USA, 1926

CAST Reginald Denny, Laura La Plante, E.J. Radcliffe, Ben Hendricks, Lionel Braham, Lucille Ward, Hedda Hopper, Henry A. Barrows, and Arthur Lake **PRODUCTION** Universal Pictures Corp. **PRINT SOURCE** Universal Pictures

S *Skinner's Dress Suit* was a well-known commodity by the time Universal Pictures reimaged it for comedian Reginald Denny. The character of Skinner was the brainchild of American author Henry Irving Dodge, whose "Skinner's Dress Suit" was serialized in *The Saturday Evening Post* before it was published as a novel in 1916. Audiences first saw Skinner on screen the following year in a series of successful films produced by the Essanay Film Manufacturing Company, directed by Harry Beaumont and featuring Bryant Washburn in the starring role: *Skinner's Dress Suit* (1917), *Skinner's Bubble* (1917), and *Skinner's Baby* (1917). The well-liked confection proved ideal source material for the charismatic Denny, and Universal secured the rights in 1925 as one of their "Universal-Jewel" releases, making it one of the studio's prestige productions.

In 1926, Reginald Denny was at the height of his fame as a star comedian who played the American everyman confronting modern life much in the style of Harold Lloyd. Film critic Iris Barry (later the first film curator of the Museum of Modern Art), in her 1926 article "The Cinema: Lesser Glories" for Britain's *The Spectator*, noted: "A newer figure is Reginald Denny. His films are definitely delightful and extremely funny, not farces like those of Lloyd

or Keaton, but real, light comedy, from which the humor of dress suits, dance partners and domestic and business life in general is deftly extracted."

Denny came from a theatrical family. Born Reginald Leigh Dugmore in England in 1891, he adopted his father's stage surname—Denny—after he ran away from school at sixteen and became an actor. He worked continuously in Britain and abroad until enlisting in the Royal Flying Corps in 1917. Denny's lifelong interest in aviation began during his service in World War I, which is also when he further cultivated his pugilistic skills, eventually winning his brigade's heavyweight boxing championship. His boxing experience served him well in Hollywood as a result of the popularity of the boxing series *The Leather Pushers* (1922), produced by Universal. Good-looking and well-built, Denny had a fine sense of humor and was not above appearing ridiculous if the story required it. Denny excelled at light comedy and his best films are precursors of the great screwball comedies of the 1930s. He also had excellent taste in story ideas; he receives story credit for six of his films and is uncredited on many others as he sought involvement in the creation of all his starring features. Fortunately for Denny, he had a perfect collaborator in director William A. Seiter, whose notable body of work primarily

involves comedy teams—the Laurel and Hardy classic *Sons of the Desert* (1933), *Room Service* (1938) with the Marx Brothers, and Abbott and Costello’s *Little Giant* (1946), to name a few.

Denny and Seiter’s first film together, *The Fast Worker* (1924), costarred the perky Laura La Plante who became Denny’s favorite leading lady. The on-screen pairing was a happy and successful one. Denny had recommended La Plante for the part as they had worked well together in a previous film, *Sporting Youth* (1923). She is best remembered today for the Paul Leni comedy-mystery thrillers *The Cat and the Canary* (1927) and *The Last Warning* (1929). In addition to being a favorite of Denny, she was the object of Seiter’s affection and they became engaged while making *Skinner’s Dress Suit*. The on-screen chemistry between

Denny and La Plante is unmistakable; yet it was the collaboration between Denny and Seiter that was essential to the success of *Skinner*. In a 1964 interview with film historian Kevin Brownlow, Denny reflected on Seiter: “We never had ... a cross word, and we always brought the picture in within budget. We used to sit down and talk the story over before shooting. There was a great interchange of ideas; we’d listen to anybody. If someone thought we could do something better, why not? We’d try it again. But basically, the great secret was that Bill Seiter and myself would get the script, and we’d make suggestions, and argue like hell. Finally, we’d get it right. You can’t be a comedian unless you think what you’re doing is funny.”

The scenario for *Skinner’s Dress Suit*, credited to Rex Taylor, is written with flair and charm, showcasing the likeable lead characters in relatable situations. *Skinner* (Reginald Denny) feels trapped behind the iron bars of the cashier’s cage at McLaughlin and Perkins, Inc. His adoring wife, Honey (Laura La Plante), wants him to move up the corporate ladder and prods him to ask for a pay raise. Honey idolizes her husband and sees him as “a master of men and events.” In reality, he is not a success at his job and fails to get the raise. When Honey presses him, he lies that he secured ten dollars more a week. An elated Honey immediately buys her husband a dress suit—the white tie and tails worn on formal occasions held in the evening—and something for herself so they can look their best at a party held by the local smart set led by Mrs. Colby. Dressed in their finery, the two are like ducks out of water at the fancy soiree until they make a splash dancing the latest craze, the Savannah Shuffle. His social success in his dress suit is proof that “clothes make the man.” *Skinner* performs a more

intricate dance, however, trying to keep one step ahead of bill collectors, and his wife, when he loses his job altogether. Ultimately, Honey’s confidence in her “big, handsome, successful husband” wins him a contract his employer thought was lost—and a happy ending.

The production, too, was a happy one, and a highlight of the filming was the staging of the Savannah Shuffle in the party sequence. Denny himself contrived the dance’s ridiculous steps, a combination of the Charleston, the Gaby Glide, and a duck waddle. The notable supporting cast includes actress (and future gossip columnist) Hedda Hopper as Mrs. Colby and a young Arthur Lake (best remembered as Dagwood Bumstead in the numerous *Blondie* films he made for Columbia Pictures between 1938 and 1950) as the office boy. Janet Gaynor and Reginald Denny’s future wife Isabelle Stiefel appear uncredited as party guests.

Skinner’s Dress Suit enjoyed favorable reviews. Mordaunt Hall in the *New York Times* reported that the film, which premiered at the prestigious Rivoli Theatre in Manhattan, was received “by many a good hearty round of applause” and assessed it simply as “... a feature that comes in the category of nice comedies.” *Photoplay* proclaimed, “A refreshingly clean comedy with an excellent cast, ably directed.” The *San Francisco News* noted: “Reginald Denny is decidedly in his element as Skinner. He gets out every ounce of fun there is in a role of the harassed young husband and the situations which he finds himself.” Bryant Washburn attempted to recreate the film’s, and his own, success with *Skinner’s Big Idea* (1928), but the effort failed. In 1929, Universal remade *Skinner’s Dress Suit* as *Skinner Steps Out*, a talking film starring Glenn Tryon. Yet no other film version—before or since—approaches the appeal of Reginald Denny’s.

The arrival of sound films revealed Denny’s distinctive British accent and rendered his portrayal of the American everyman impossible. After a few starring roles, he was relegated to playing Englishmen in supporting parts. Meanwhile, Denny’s aviation hobby had become more than a pastime when he formed Reginald Denny Industries in 1935 for the manufacture of recreational model planes. He developed the first scaled remote piloted vehicle—a radio-controlled drone aircraft—that the U.S. Army used for training and combat during World War II.

Still, Denny had a long, varied career as a character actor up until his death in 1967 at the age of seventy-five. He appeared in more than a hundred sound films, including Cecil B. DeMille’s *Madame Satan* (1930), Sidney Franklin’s film version of Noel Coward’s play *Private Lives* (1931), George Cukor’s *Romeo and Juliet* (1936), Alfred Hitchcock’s *Rebecca* (1940), the Cary Grant-Myrna Loy classic *Mr. Blandings Builds His Dream House* (1948), and the campy comic book caper *Batman* (1966), not to mention his frequent television and stage work.

In 1964 Kevin Brownlow arranged for Denny and his family to see *Skinner’s Dress Suit* in the form of an old 16mm print from Universal’s Show-at-Home movie library. Denny had not seen any of his silent films in more than twenty years and was reluctant, telling Brownlow that the film would “creak.” Instead, Denny was delighted by a fast-paced and charming comedy. “It certainly stands up a lot better than I thought it would,” was the actor’s modest assessment. *Skinner’s Dress Suit* is the finest example of Reginald Denny’s little-known and underappreciated comedy and, now in this new restoration by Universal, further evidence of the superb craftsmanship typical of Hollywood in the 1920s.

— JEFFREY VANCE





THE FIRE BRIGADE

MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT BY STEPHEN HORNE AND FRANK BOCKIUS

DIRECTED BY WILLIAM NIGH, USA, 1926

CAST Charles Ray, May McAvoy, Holmes Herbert, Eugenie Besserer, Tim O'Brien, Warner Richmond, and DeWitt Jennings **PRODUCTION** MGM **PRINT SOURCE** Library of Congress

When I was working on the *Hollywood TV* series in the 1970s, I had a challenge from the outset; how to persuade an audience which had contempt for silent films not to switch off. I took a risk: first I showed a rescue from a burning building, made at the beginning of cinema and symbolic of what people imagined all silents to be, and then I cut direct to the lush professionalism of MGM's *The Fire Brigade*, from the silent era at its peak. Yes, it was an outrageous thing to do, but I'll guarantee that that sequence with Charles Ray rescuing a baby from an inferno won us an audience—instantly. The picture, directed by the neglected William Nigh, could have been made in the 1940s. For its professionalism alone it deserves a place in the canon. And it wasn't lurid melodrama; it had an intelligent, socially conscious storyline involving municipal corruption.

Moving Picture World's advance review declared: "The conflagration scene is the most stupendous from the standpoint of realism and proportion that has ever been incorporated in a feature production." The reviewer was dismayed that the MGM publicity department had decided to avoid superlatives "and be cringing in a corner" when describing the equipment used for that scene. *MPW* interviewed Chief Ralph Scott, who told them that Los Angeles had sixty-five fire companies and that of this total "forty units with 300 firemen transported by forty-five pieces of apparatus

representing every known type of vehicle in the fire-fighting world, tore through the film capital until they reached Culver City."

Margaret Chute, of the British *Picturegoer*, toured the Hollywood studios gathering material for a 1927 article on "Midnight Movie Making": "It is the up-to-date custom to photograph scenes supposed to take place during the evening in actual darkness, with the aid of powerful lights concentrated on the right spot, instead of taking these scenes in daylight and then colouring the whole strip of film dark blue or green, as was the method in earlier days."

She arrived at the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studios to watch them stage the fire that formed the climax of *The Fire Brigade*. I quote her at length here, as she provides a compelling eyewitness account of the process as overseen by chief cameraman John Arnold, renowned in the industry for shooting 1925's *The Big Parade*:

As our car drove past the silent stages there was a great light in the sky, and turning the corner we came upon a vast open space with ten huge sun-arcs concentrated on the front of a twelve-storey house.

That house looked very solid, but was only a shell in reality. Behind the rows of windows came a plain dark wall, but no rooms lay beyond, merely wooden platforms along which electricians and 'prop' men clambered, carrying lighted torches. The open space was

filled with a struggling mass of firemen, fire-escapes, fire-engines, a crowd of onlookers engaged in the film, a half dozen cameras with their attendant crews.

Some of the cameras were raised on portable platforms; two were perched on skeleton wooden towers, high above the crowd. Opposite the big house, which represented an orphanage, a special stand seating three hundred people had been constructed. It was filled with an excited audience of film stars, their friends, and representatives of the leading Los Angeles newspapers.

Dark and quiet, the orphanage waited for the great event. Voices shouted, horses rattled their harness, Charles Ray dashed about in his fireman's uniform. Suddenly, at the striking of a gong, flames broke out above the main door of the orphanage.

Creeping along, licking their way from floor to floor, up they went, relentlessly, till the whole of the front of that sham building was a mass of fire. It was done by means of open gas pipes fixed to each window; on the galleries behind the windows the men with torches—themselves invisible—applied their torches to the pipes and so the flames shot up and up.

Then came the water-hoses, playing over the blazing building; cameras grinding, men yelling. Ten minutes it lasted, while some marvellous fire scenes were caught by the cameras. Then at a signal, the gas was turned off at the main; out went the flames, and in a few minutes the smoke-scorched, fire-proofed building was standing dark and still in the night.

The producer was Harry Rapf (along with Hunt Stromberg). A founding member of MGM, Rapf was regarded initially as one of a ruling triumvirate with Mayer and Thalberg. But he had charge of

the second-class features. He had presided over minor but often excellent pictures at Warner Bros., notably the first proper Rin-Tin-Tin, *Where the North Begins* (1923), and at MGM, *Exit Smiling* (1926), the enchanting Beatrice Lillie comedy. This was his first spectacular prestige picture. Louis B. Mayer was keen on firemen and twenty-five percent of the film's profits were to go to the founding of a college for the training of firefighters.

The Fire Brigade was shot in an incredible twenty-eight days (*The Scarlet Letter*, a simpler production altogether, was allotted forty-eight days) and budgeted at \$249,556. According to Thomas Schatz's *Genius of the System*, "the second-class status of the project was obvious from the budget, with only \$60,000 going for director, cast, story and continuity. But the attractions in *The Fire Brigade* were spectacle, special effects and fiery destruction rather than star and director. The budget allowed \$25,000 for photographic effects and another \$66,000 for sets, a relatively high figure since many of the sets had to be not only built and 'dressed' but destroyed as well."

This was one of MGM's "non-star" pictures, as May McAvoy was classed as a "featured player" and Charles Ray had lost his position at the top of box-office polls. He had specialized in hayseed roles, both funny and poignant, in stories often set on farms. (There was an agricultural slump in the 1920s.) In 1921, Ray had made a picture famous for being without titles, *The Old Swimmin' Hole*, which was shown recently at the Pordenone Silent Film Festival. While Ray's acting was skillful, the film has not stood the test of time.

When Ernst Lubitsch came to Hollywood, he singled out Ray as the best actor in American films. It was thought he would soon rank alongside the great players. Ray became independent and directed



and starred in a film about the Mayflower, *The Courtship of Miles Standish* (1923). He financed it himself and its failure ruined him. The popular William Haines, who had entered pictures in 1922, started out imitating Ray. By 1926, with both under contract to MGM, it seems Ray was imitating Haines. And certainly this young fireman who goes on strike is a role more suitable to Haines, who had risen to stardom playing rebellious (sometimes obnoxious) young men who were redeemed in the last reel.

Director William Nigh, who had come to prominence with *My Four Years in Germany* (1918) and went on to direct Lon Chaney in two films, had a somewhat scandalous private life (charged with "assault with intent to kill" after getting arrested at a party in Laurel Canyon). However, actress Pauline Frederick called him "a wonderful director who gives you the greatest confidence."

The appearance of both two-color Technicolor and a new color process invented by Max Handschiegl in the climactic fire scenes must have stunned audiences. *Variety* called the film "an out-and-out hokum thriller of the type mass audiences eat up"; while *Photoplay* fully endorsed it: "hokum is a quality that cheats you ... This film doesn't cheat. The thrills in it are not only tremendously exciting, but real." Despite such enthusiasm, the picture lost money. And late in 1926, William Nigh had his contract canceled. Was it just too realistic, frightening big city audiences who were already paranoid enough about fire?

— KEVIN BROWNLOW

What Supervision Cost THE FIRE BRIGADE

by Welford Beaton

Various reasons have been advanced to explain the failure of **The Fire Brigade** at the box office. The generally accepted explanation is that its title militated against its success. Titles have some effect on the box office, but I do not believe they can make failures out of good pictures, or make successes out of poor pictures. It is word-of-mouth advertising that is the determining factor in deciding the fate of a picture, and such advertising is not affected by a title. The most a title can do is to lessen the early attendance. If the picture be an outstanding one it can live down the poorest title that can be tacked on it. The other night I viewed **The Fire Brigade** for a second time in an effort to see if I could determine what is the matter with it. I decided that it lacks what makes **Seventh Heaven** great: a soul. It tries to embrace too much territory. There is grandfather love in it, also mother love, brother love, and the love of a boy and a girl for one another. It is too much. When I watched the superb performance of Charles Ray, unquestionably one of the two or three best actors on the screen; and the exquisite art of that beautiful creature, May McAvoy, I regretted that Metro had not made a great love story out of the picture, and centered on the young people to make it appealing. But the circumstances under which the picture was made are responsible for its failure. Screen art is subtle. When I first reviewed **Seventh Heaven**

I said, in effect, that such a picture could have been the product only of perfect harmony on the set. **The Fire Brigade** could have been as great if it had been made as greatly. But it was supervised to death. Throughout the entire time of its making Hunt Stromberg nagged at Bill Nigh until he nearly drove the director crazy. Once Nigh threatened to kill Stromberg if he did not get off the set, and in a more human moment threatened to deliver just one blow that would squash Hunt's nose all over his face. Imagine trying to turn out a good picture under such circumstances. If Bill Nigh had been left alone I am confident that **The Fire Brigade** would have been a box office triumph. Stromberg's method of supervision probably cost Metro the greater part of a million dollars. Nigh was signed for ten weeks in which to make the picture. When he arrived on the lot the story was in such a mess that his first six weeks were devoted to endeavoring to inject some new sense in it. The shooting was just nicely under way when his contract expired. For a couple of days the cast remained idle, but the overhead remained active, while the terms of Nigh's continuing contract were discussed. When the shooting was resumed the director was subjected to such annoying supervision that it was impossible for him to do his best work. He would be in the middle of a carefully rehearsed scene, and director and actors would be concentrating on it, when Stromberg

would visit the set and want to know why the scene was being shot that way, what was the matter with the lights, and who the fellow over there was. Nigh was forced to shoot scenes that he knew were awful, but which were ordered by the supervisor. He shot that great scene between Ray and Holmes Herbert in the way that reached the screen, but Stromberg said it was wrong. It took two days to make the set-up again and reshoot the sequence in accordance with Stromberg's conception of it. It

never got beyond the projection-room, but it cost two days overhead. Nigh was twenty-two weeks on the job. If the script had been ready for him when he arrived on the lot, and if Stromberg had let him alone, he could have shot the picture in eight or nine weeks. The thing that is the matter with **The Fire Brigade** is supervision.

Reprinted from the September 3, 1927, issue of *The Film Spectator*.



About Welford Beaton

Editor and publisher of *The Film Spectator* Welford Beaton was unabashed in his admiration for the pictures he approved of: "When I viewed *Seventh Heaven* for the first time I thought I had enjoyed the greatest bliss that the screen could provide. But last week I enjoyed even greater bliss: I viewed *Seventh Heaven* a second time." A few issues later he writes, "A third visit to *Seventh Heaven* revealed several new places to cry," then segues into berating Fox's Winnie Sheehan for making Janet Gaynor cry and getting her to sign a five-year contract at a ridiculously low weekly rate. *The Film Spectator* (later *The Hollywood Spectator*) was serious business, and it is obvious on first glance: there are no production stills, no slick studio advertisements, only unadorned box ads—it is cover-to-cover, black-and-white, straight-shooting film talk. Beaton was as unreserved in his disdain of the mediocre as he was in praising films that appealed. He fearlessly assigned blame, always with a scathing wit, though he was not above carping about things like faulty

punctuation in intertitles. His best barbs were reserved for the studio system, whose wastefulness, he said, was not only ruining movies but also shafting its craftspeople out of fair pay. Their salaries could have been much higher, and movie budgets lower, if not for shooting every scene as close-ups, medium, and long shots, so-called coverage, or the extravagant salaries of upper echelon producers like Harry Rapf and Irving Thalberg (yes, he named them). Many of the creatives agreed, judging from insiders' willingness to spill the behind-the-scenes beans to him, as Nigh or someone close to Nigh must have done for this juicy smackdown of Stromberg. Don't threaten to sue him, either. He knew libel laws protect the truth-teller and wrote about that, too. Beaton's access and his refreshing frankness about what made a good picture turned his publication into essential reading for late silent-era Hollywoodland. — Editor



LIMITE

MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT BY THE MATTI BYE ENSEMBLE

DIRECTED BY MÁRIO PEIXOTO, BRAZIL, 1931

CAST Olga Breno, Taciana Rei, Raul Schnoor, Brutus Pedreira, and Carmen Santos PRINT SOURCE Janus Films

Limite was the only film completed by writer and director Mário Peixoto. Perhaps it could only have been made by someone who had never attempted a movie before: someone like the twenty-two-year-old Peixoto who wanted to create something entirely new, to push beyond the limit—the final, utmost, or furthest boundary—of cinema.

There are many boundaries in the film: between land and sea, present and past, life and death, and between one image and the next. Meaning resides not so much within individual images as in the relationships between them. Sometimes the connection is a neat visual rhyme: the churning wheels of a train become the wheel of a sewing machine; a palm tree is matched with an electric pole radiating power lines; a close-up of the neck and shoulder of a man slumped over in despair gives way to the gaping gills of a fish drowning in air. At other times, as in the opening sequence, the leaps between the images are bigger: from a dark huddle of vultures on a rock to a woman gazing at the camera with a man's handcuffed fists encircling her neck. Another woman's eyes fill the screen and dissolve into an expanse of water that dances with flakes of fire.

In the second, cryptic image of the face and handcuffs lies the seed of the movie. Here Peixoto restages a picture by the great Hungarian photographer André Kertész that he had seen

on the cover of the pictorial magazine *Vu* in a Paris newsstand. From this germ he had written a scenario that he presented to Brazilian filmmakers Humberto Mauro and Adhemar Gonzaga, initially hoping to play the lead role. They declined the project and urged him to direct it himself, which he did, using his own family money (he came from a wealthy Brazilian clan but had been raised in Europe). It is easy to see why the established directors might have considered the scenario too idiosyncratic for anyone to make except the man who had dreamed it up. It is an intensely strange, and strangely intense, movie, impossible to describe without employing reference to dreams. A man and two women are adrift in a small rowboat; we never learn how they wound up in this predicament, or why, when the film opens, they have sunk into listless defeat. Woman 2 (as she is identified in the credits, played by Taciana Rei) lies unconscious in the stern; Man 1 (Raul Schnoor) sits with his head hanging, his hair over his eyes; only Woman 1 (Olga Breno), occupying the prow like a figurehead, shows some stubborn will to survive. As they brood, gazing out at the endless water and the relentless light, scenes from their lives drift past like fragments from a shipwreck, full of extreme but often indecipherable feeling. There are only three intertitles in the film, and they do little to clarify matters.

Shot around the coastal village of Mangaratiba, with a tiny cast and equally tiny crew, *Limite* had a

few showings in Rio de Janeiro in 1931 and 1932 but got little traction. Over the years it gradually built something of a cult—Orson Welles saw it in the early 1940s when he was in Brazil shooting *It's All True*, and was duly impressed—but by the late 1950s the lone nitrate print had deteriorated to the point where it could not be projected. During the years when it was impossible to see, its reputation grew to mythic proportions, thanks in part to Peixoto's persistent efforts to keep alive the memory of his masterpiece, which included circulating an adulatory review that he claimed Eisenstein had written but that he later admitted he had penned himself. He described shots that

do not exist in the print and probably never did, creating another, imagined version of the film that threatened to overshadow the actual work. Eventually, however, *Limite* was resurrected, thanks in large part to the stewardship of Saulo Pereira de Mello, who rescued the print after Brazil's military dictatorship confiscated it in 1966, along with two Soviet titles. A restoration, the result of multinational collaborative effort supported by the World Cinema Project, had its U.S. premiere in 2010.

This lost-and-found history befits a film about people inhabiting a liminal space at the edge of death, a film of ravishing beauty and bitter

desolation. The framing device of the three ragged castaways morosely succumbing to their fate might be an allegory for the way each of them is somehow imprisoned, stuck, and desperate. Woman 1 has escaped from jail but still seems trapped. She is associated with sharp edges and straight lines: the razor she uses to open a tin of biscuits, cutting her finger; the gleaming scissor blade she thumbs; the bars of a prison cell and the hard lines of curbs, fences, and window frames. Woman 2 arrives home, carrying a dead fish in a basket, to find her drunken husband curled up on the stairs; she walks out in disgust, and later perches on a crest of rock gazing distraughtly down at the ocean's edge. Man 1 enjoys the film's happiest interlude, strolling on the beach with a woman and wading together into water up to their thighs, amid lovely images of vines, branches, palms, reeds shaking in the wind, the reflection of trees shivering on water. But a second flashback opens with the same images repeated, now darkened or flipped in negative; a mysterious confrontation in a graveyard (with a man played by the director) reveals that Man 1 is a widower in love with a married woman. These plot elements are only ever hinted at, but the mood of entrapment and paralysis is overwhelming. When a snippet of a Chaplin film is seen in a movie theater (1917's *The Adventurer*), it shows Charlie burrowing up out of the sand on a beach in prison stripes, only to find himself looking into the barrel of a guard's rifle.

The film is full of movement, of wind and rippling water and watery light, hair blowing and feet pacing, yet it keeps returning to the stasis of the boat and ends where it began with a conclave of vultures. The tempo swings wildly between slow, lingering scenes with a feeling of heaviness and frantically edited sequences in which the shots smash up against each other like waves—for

instance during Man 1's hysterical breakdown, which is followed by tranquil images of fishing boats, nets, and gentle lapping surf. If the men and women are beset by passivity and impotence, the camera is a constantly active presence: it has all the physical freedom the characters lack. Cinematographer Edgar Brazil creates bizarre, impossible angles: shooting up from the ground as though, like Chaplin in that clip, he were buried in the sand; getting so close to the surging pistons of train wheels that you wonder he wasn't mauled; peering down on people's heads or barging right through their bodies; sometimes tipping over sideways or spinning wildly like a kid chasing dizziness.

What defines the visual quality of the film above all is its intense, tactile physicality: textures, temperatures, smells seem to jump from the screen. These men and women—who seem like urban types in their suits and fedoras, high heels and chic skirts—are confronted by the intractability of nature, the impossibility of escaping the needs and sensations of their bodies. The feverish, protean flow of images mimics the warping of their heat- and thirst-addled brains, as well as the liquid, ever-changing nature of the element that surrounds them. *Limite*, like the works of Jean Epstein and Jean Renoir, illustrates the link between water and the fluidity of film. It leaves its audience, like its characters, drowning in cinema.

— IMOGEN SARA SMITH



MISSION IMPROBABLE SAVING *LIMITE*

by Shari Kizirian

The Film Foundation (TFF), established in 1990 by America's premier cinephile, director Martin Scorsese, has provided support for the restoration of more than nine hundred titles, with about thirty percent hailing from the silent era. San Francisco Silent Film Festival audiences have benefited greatly over the years, getting to see restorations of Chaplin short comedies, a host of Hitchcock silents, the moving antiwar film *All Quiet on the Western Front*, and the delightful *Rosita*, the Lubitsch-Pickford collaboration unavailable since its original release. At this edition of the festival two restorations screen that have benefitted from TFF funding: *The Fire Brigade*, with its recreated color effects, and *Limite*, a rare surviving Brazilian silent film that has the additional distinction of being the only silent restored as part of TFF's World Cinema Project, started in 2007 to rescue cinema heritages in even greater peril than our own.

Limite's road to restoration was a long one and involved the dedication of two other principal cinephiles who, in succession, held onto the single surviving nitrate print: Plínio Süsskind Rocha, a professor of physics who organized yearly screenings of the film at the Rio de Janeiro university where he taught, and a student, Saulo Pereira de Mello, who saw *Limite* on a date at such a screening. That night, according to film critic José Carlos Avellar, Pereira de Mello "fell in love at first sight," with the film—and safeguarding it became his lifework. Over the years Pereira de Mello's mission included, among other extraordinary feats,

unwinding the reels for occasional sunbaths to slow the deterioration accelerated by Rio's high humidity and, later, photographing the entire print on a makeshift light-table, a process that took three months and took over his entire household. "We could hardly move," Pereira de Mello later said. "We were surrounded on all sides by film." The resulting frame-by-frame study was published as a book in 1979 and scholarship on director Mário Peixoto and his only completed motion picture began to flourish, with essays and books, including the original scenario for *Limite*, seeing publication.

A third person crucial to the film's restoration is Walter Salles, best known in the U.S. for directing the 1998 Oscar-nominated feature *Central Station* and one of several international filmmakers involved with WCP since its beginnings. Salles first saw *Limite* on VHS back in the mid-1970s when he was twenty years old and recalls that even in that format, it made a "profound and everlasting impact—and not only for me." He endeavored to help Pereira de Mello with *Limite* and used his own resources in 1996 to back the establishment of the Mário Peixoto Archive, which Pereira de Mello ran with his wife Alya for twenty-four years (he died in April 2020 from Covid-19). It was Salles who brought the film's situation to the attention of Scorsese. The World Cinema Project then organized funding for Cinemateca Brasileira and Cineteca di Bologna to carry out a restoration, which Pereira de Mello supervised himself. After the restored *Limite* premiered in São Paulo in



2010, it toured as part of a WCP festival and was released on DVD in the United States courtesy of Criterion Collection.

Such meandering paths to restoration and ultimately back to audiences are what TFF executive director Margaret Bodde and WCP team member Cecilia Cenciarelli expect for the films they take on. Bodde calls Italian archivist Cenciarelli the organization's "secret weapon, the Jane Bond" of film restoration, for astutely tapping into a global network of archives and collections. Cenciarelli's day job as head of research and special projects at Cineteca di Bologna provides a great vantage from which to search out not only the best available prints but also local experts with deep knowledge of the films and the stories behind their survival. *Limite* is "the only record of a young, gifted artist," says Cenciarelli, and reason enough for supporting

its restoration, but Süsskind Rocha and Pereira de Mello's extraordinary efforts to save it have become part of what she calls the "soul" of the film, something also worth preserving.

Cenciarelli has tracked the fate of films under all manner of threats, from Mohammad Reza Aslani's *The Chess of the Wind*, made in pre-Revolutionary Iran, to Tewfik Saleh's *The Dupes*, from 1973, in particular danger because of the decade-long Syrian Civil War. In addition to everything else that contributed to the loss of most of the world's silent films, wars and political repression can pose insurmountable obstacles to rediscovery and preservation. In 1966 Brazil's military dictatorship seized the only copy of *Limite*—until it was somehow released back into Pereira de Mello's hands. Just last year, when

Limite was celebrating its ninetieth anniversary, its home archive, Cinemateca Brasileira, sat shuttered and unmanned by order of the Bolsonaro administration. Still, *Limite* is one of the lucky ones. "Not much [of the period] survives from these regions," Cenciarelli notes with regret, so it's unlikely we'll ever see another silent restored under WCP's banner. The Film Foundation, however, has more on the way. Margaret Bodde recalls that in the early years Scorsese brought titles to her urgent attention with post-it notes that papered over her desk. Nowadays, Bodde says, email messages fill up her inbox.



DANS LA NUIT

MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT BY STEPHEN HORNE

DIRECTED BY CHARLES VANEL, FRANCE, 1930

CAST Charles Vanel and Sandra Milovanoff **PRODUCTION** Les Films Fernand Weill **PRINT SOURCE** Institut Lumière

IN 1949, Jean Cocteau led the jury for a festival in Biarritz, the vision for which was to resurrect a number of films that had been buried in their own time, whether by audiences, by critics, or even by the filmmakers themselves. They called it “Le Festival du Film Maudit,” thus coining a term—literally, “cursed film”—that would be used and debated long after. Is a film maudit just a worthy flop, or is it one that was reviled? neglected? You can argue these points and more. But above all, a film maudit is one that arrived at the wrong time, only to find that its brilliance could not be appreciated by more than a few. And it’s hard to imagine a film more maudit than one that arrived with the last gasp of an era, when fashions had changed so completely that movie houses could scarcely be persuaded to screen it.

Such was the fate of *Dans la Nuit*, the extraordinary silent film directed in 1929 by the great French character actor Charles Vanel. It’s that year—1929—that doomed it, and not any defect of quality or even critical judgment. The reviews, in fact, were quite good. The timing was not; *Dans la Nuit* wasn’t released into theaters until May 1930, making it one of the last, if not the last major French silent film. And by 1930, what the punters wanted, to quote Norma Desmond, was “talk, talk, talk.”

The movie was what we now call “a passion project,” but far better than most such endeavors.

Vanel was thirty-seven, but had almost sixty years of career still ahead of him. He was born in Rennes, Brittany, in 1892. Vanel at first wanted to be a sailor, but poor eyesight put him on the path that eventually made him an actor. He appeared in his first film sometime around 1911, age twenty; Vanel died in 1989 after a career of nearly two hundred movies (he worked so often that the numbers remain fuzzy). The idea that would lead to his one full-length feature was linked to memories of childhood and family life. Vanel’s father worked in a sawmill in the vicinity of where *Dans la Nuit* was filmed: Jujurieux, in the Rhône-Alpes region, on the left bank of the Ain River, an area “dear to Vanel,” as Bertrand Tavernier said years later.

Location filming, conducted outdoors as much as possible in the summer of 1929, was a virtue of necessity for Vanel, as it was cheaper than the fees for renting a studio. He himself played the nameless quarry worker, who we first see moving through pictorially magnificent scenes of his daily backbreaking work. Still, the worker is a happy man, and soon we see why, as the next sequence follows the worker through the breathless happiness of his wedding day. The worker and his bride (Sandra Milovanoff) dance on sun-dappled terraces and ride to a local fairground, Vanel’s often handheld or ride-mounted camera echoing their dizzy happiness. (The cinematography was by Georges Asselin.)

This section of the movie lasts nearly the entire first half, but it's easy to sense that joy won't last for a man who makes his living in such a dangerous way. He's injured in a horrifying cave-in, caused unknowingly by a group of romping children. It seems the worker might die, but his life is saved. His face, however, is not; seeing that his bride can scarcely bear to look in his direction, the worker obtains a metal mask to cover most of it.

And here the visuals take on all the darkness and pulsing terror of a horror movie. The shots become long, even agonizing, as the camera slows down and lingers on the wife's sadness and revulsion and the intense bitterness of the worker. Milovanoff, an actress of tough, muscular good looks, is playing a young woman of strong appetites; what can this wife do but take a lover? And should this lover

happen across a spare mask, and with casual cruelty decide to try it on—what can ensue, but more pain and terror.

The late Bertrand Tavernier long championed *Dans la Nuit*, saying it “shows a freedom of tone to treat both dread and happiness, a richness of subject, a patience with the image itself, a requirement, a rhythm: in short, cinematographic poetry.” The bucolic first half has warmth and charm, but it's the second half, with its inky shadows, menacing hearth fires, and abrupt violence, that achieves the richest emotions and bleakest fear. It's a shame, then, that censorship worries eventually resulted in a tacked-on ending that was not part of Vanel's original vision, even if it stays in tune with the dreamy beauty of his earlier images.



"IN SHORT, CINEMATOGRAPHIC POETRY."

Of course, *Dans la Nuit* is far from the only film that has ever tried to undo a gloomy denouement with an abrupt shift to “it's all a dream!” One such case is Fritz Lang's 1944 *The Woman in the Window*. Lang claimed the dream fake-out was his idea, and I've defended the ending before; while not ideal, it does fit with the movie's consistently off-kilter style, its grim jokes and its overall stylized film-noir vibe. It's harder to make such an argument for the ending of *Dans la Nuit*; the abrupt reversal feels instead like a betrayal of both the vivid realism we'd fallen in love with during the movie's first reels, and the searing emotion of the second half.

Vanel directed one more film, a short called *Affaire Classée*, in 1932, but it wasn't released until 1935, under the title *Le Coup de Minuit*. He continued as a character actor of astonishing range and accomplishment; no one who sees Vanel in *Le Ciel Est à Vous* (1944) or perhaps in his most famous role, in *The Wages of Fear* (1953), will ever forget him. But the directing road remained not taken. In a late-life interview, Vanel remarked that “the most interesting job in cinema is not that of actor but that of director.” Still, he admitted, the sheer volume of what a director had to put up with got to him. “It was necessary to justify each line of the scenario in front of the producer—when it was not in front of his mistress; to embark on complex financial negotiations, to accept actors imposed by the distributors when they weren't right for the roles...” Vanel continued, “As I earned a lot of money as an actor, I did what I wanted, I was calm. I finally gave

up, but I sometimes regretted it. I didn't feel like having to fight all my life.”

There have been a number of actors who directed a film (or two or three) only to rush straight back to acting, including some in the silent era. Lillian Gish directed 1920's *Remodeling Her Husband*, now lost; Mabel Normand directed a number of comedy shorts in 1914–15, but nothing after; Reginald Denny directed a talkie, *The Big Bluff*, in 1933. Perhaps the most famous example is from the sound era, though it is suffused with silent-film aesthetics: Charles Laughton's 1954 *Night of the Hunter*.

While preparing his one-off masterpiece, Laughton screened D.W. Griffith's silents over and over, and told Lillian Gish that “Griffith's pictures made you sit up straight in your chair in anticipation of what was coming ... All the surprise has gone out of modern films.” The gorgeous, haunting world of Vanel's film is certainly another example of what Laughton was talking about. Now the restoration of *Dans la Nuit* shows Laughton's fellow Charles was also a distinctive talent, another actor-filmmaker who left behind a compelling work of art along with wistful thoughts of what might have been.

— FARRAN SMITH NEHME



A SISTER OF SIX

MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT BY GUENTER BUCHWALD AND FRANK BOCKIUS

DIRECTED BY RAGNAR HYLÉN-CAVALLIUS, SWEDEN-GERMANY, 1926

CAST Betty Balfour, Willy Fritsch, Ann-Lisa Ryding, Werner Fuetterer, Karin Swanström, Stina Berg, and Ivan Hedqvist **PRODUCTION** Isepa **ORIGINAL LANGUAGE TITLE** *Flickorna Gyurkovics* **PRINT SOURCE** Swedish Film Institute

The box office is a weekly popularity contest. And in Britain in the 1920s, the winner of that contest was very often Betty Balfour. She won the other kind, too, being regularly voted the nation's favorite film star.

A dimple-cheeked petite blonde with a smile just the right side of naughtiness, and a pair of bright sparkling eyes, Balfour was described by *Pictures and Picturegoer* magazine in 1924 as "a winsome, laughter-loving slip of a girl, whose middle name is Optimism, and who first and last names spell 'Begone Dull Care' in the minds of discerning kinemagoers." With her vivacious smile and expressive face she brought a precious brand of joy to the screen, even when she was directed by Alfred Hitchcock as a spoiled heiress in need of reformation in his silent *Champagne* (1928). Film historian Rachael Low described her as "able to register on screen a charm and expression unequalled among the actresses in British film."

Balfour was born in 1903, and she was a London girl, though she may well have been born much farther north in England. She first appeared on the London stage aged ten in 1914 and continued to tread the boards until 1920, when producer-director George Pearson spotted her and hired her to appear in his films. He was famously besotted with his beautiful young protégée, and although he was never able to make her his wife, he did make

her famous. Pearson was instantly convinced that she was a "star in the making," so he bought the rights to a music-hall sketch called "Squibs." He thought the name "hinted at fireworks," the sparks he saw in Balfour. In Pearson's hands, Squibs became the nickname of a young woman who sold flowers in Piccadilly Circus, the eponymous heroine of his 1921 film. Shot on the streets of London, and with a show-stopping performance from Balfour as the relatable, loyal, and scrappy Squibs, the film was such a hit that a whole series was commissioned, in which Squibs would go on to win the lottery, stand for parliament, and even get married.

Although Balfour's fanciful line to the fan magazines was that she was no cockney but a "smartly-attired, highly-polished little West-End" whose big break was owed to aristocratic patronage, the public fell in love with her as that flower girl and resisted her attempt to play more glamorous roles, with the elegant wardrobes to match. "A Paris gown swamps her personality," lamented one critic. "She reminds one a little of an unhappy kitten, dressed up in some doll's clothes by a mischievous child."

Perhaps American audiences would have been more accepting. In 1922, *Variety* lamented the U.S.'s limited exposure to her charms, asking, "Where have they been hiding this gifted



pantomimist?" In 1926, *Motion Picture Classic* labeled her "Britain's Queen of Happiness" and wrote, "that means, we hope, that we'll see her pictures over here." While Balfour never made the journey to Hollywood, she soon became more than just a national treasure, making a handful of films in continental Europe, where it might not have been easier for her to escape the shadow of Squibs, but at least she could detonate her fireworks in new skies.

A Sister of Six (*Flickorna Gyurkovics*) was one of those continental films, a German-Swedish coproduction, made jointly by the Ufa and Svensk, which formed Isepa precisely for such international ventures. It was set and filmed on location in Hungary as well as at the Tempelhof studios in Berlin, and it has nothing in common with the 1916 U.S. western of the same name, starring Bessie Love. This fizzy caper comedy was directed by Stockholm-born Ragnar Hyltén-Cavallius and, while this film marked his directorial debut, he had already worked quite extensively as a screenwriter in the 1920s, including cowriting *The Saga of Gösta Berling* with director Mauritz Stiller.

Balfour's love interest is played by German star Willy Fritsch, an actor every bit as impish as she was, who also had the debonair chops that destined him to become his country's number one matinee idol in the 1930s. Elsewhere in the cast are such redoubtable figures as Russian-born actress Lydia Potechina, already seen in German films such as 1922's *Dr. Mabuse the Gambler*, playing the matriarch of the anarchic Gyurkovics family. Swedish star-director-producer Karin Swanström, who

later became head of production at AB Svensk Filmindustri, and Swedish comedy actress Stina Berg, whose face you may recall from acclaimed silents such as *Herr Arnes Pengar* (1919) and *Erotikon* (1920), make a memorable double-act as two elderly countesses who keep a padded cell in their castle to keep wayward girls in check.

Balfour herself plays Mizzi, the fourth of, you guessed it, six sisters in the Gyurkovics family (with so many unmarried daughters at home, the house is described as "a real son-in-law trap!"). We understand everything we need to know about the Gyurkovics when we read their loopy Latin motto on the family crest ("now the devil takes the chaffinch"), and everything we need to know about Mizzi when we first see her lined up in a photograph with her five sisters. Her face is blurred, because, as we'll see, this frisky little miss couldn't stay still long enough to pose for the camera. But by the end of the film's first reel we've had a showcase of the Balfour range of class-elastic comedy—whether dragging herself to haughtily flounce out of her head teacher's office, impulsively splurging her train fare on a chic silk-and-lace suit, or launching herself into a street-scrap to save a puppy with no regard for her new outfit. It's the spirit, but not the letter of Squibs.

Sister of Six is a true romantic comedy. It is a film about young love and the mischief that young lovers get up to under the noses of the older generation in order to pursue their amorous adventures. Fritsch plays Count Horkay, who turns up at the Gyurkovics household in Kecskemét posing as his friend, the sisters' cousin, who is tied into a long-distance engagement with the oldest daughter Katinka (Ann-Lisa Ryding, a Swedish actress with a brief film career, who was married to the prolific character actor Gösta Cederlund). Mizzi is making the same journey, returning from

her Budapest boarding school in mild disgrace, so she and the count meet on the train to Kecskemét. However, while he confesses to being Horkay, she snootily persists in pretending to be a Countess Hohenstein. But neither believes the other anyway. Almost immediately, the couple are taken for newlyweds by a stranger. Their first kiss, in the darkness of the railway tunnel, puts a new spin on the phrase "puppy love."

This is just enough provocation to cause rural romantic havoc, with Horkay, Katinka, and Mizzi getting all mixed up with each other and, once they finally get to the rustic Gyurkovics house, with Katinka's real suitor Geza von Radvanyi (German actor Werner Fuetterer, who had a long career but may still be best remembered as the Archangel in Murnau's *Faust*, filmed the same year as this). It takes every trick of cinematographer Carl Hoffmann's unchained, or at least very mobile, camera to follow the anarchic action.

Mizzi is the champion of this bunfight, however, and as the comedy *Sister of Six* ramps up and up, it continues to showcase not just Balfour's captivating comic skills but her burgeoning glamour, too. Both forces collide in a scene where she appears in male drag (evening dress no less) and makes a convincing attempt to woo a female fashion model. Despite the Mitteleuropean setting, British Balfour is right at home here and in fact *Sister of Six* fits perfectly into a filmography dominated by comedies of class and sex, from Pearson's recently rediscovered *Love, Life and Laughter* (1923) to the French *Bright Eyes* (1929) and the UK-made Ruritanian romp, *The Vagabond Queen* (1929). In this comic concoction from 1926 at least, a British star fully embraced a very European sense of saucy fun. God save the Queen of Happiness.

— PAMELA HUTCHINSON



THE STREET OF FORGOTTEN MEN

MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT BY DONALD SOSIN

DIRECTED BY HERBERT BRENON, USA, 1925

CAST Percy Marmont, Mary Brian, Neil Hamilton, and John Harrington **PRODUCTION** Famous Players-Lasky Corp. **PRINT SOURCE** SFSFF Collection

Herbert Brenon is among the first great names behind the camera, a gifted director once spoken of alongside Cecil B. DeMille and D.W. Griffith.

He is also among the early directors who can be considered an auteur, as he controlled many of the creative and technical components in crafting his pictures. Not only did Brenon direct more than one hundred films between 1912 and 1940, he also acted in them, closely oversaw the cinematography, and was their sometime scenario writer and sometime editor.

Despite a tendency toward fantasy, romance, and spectacle, Brenon's films were notable for their restrained sentiment and literary values. They are especially strong in the richness of their characters, enhanced by the affecting performances that he was able to draw from both established actors and newcomers alike. In his day, Brenon was rightly acclaimed as a "director of actors."

Brenon began as an actor and scriptwriter and even managed a small-town nickelodeon for a time. He directed his first film, a one-reeler, in 1911. In 1913 he directed the lavish four-reel *Ivanhoe* and the acclaimed two-reel *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. He followed these with the seven-reel *Neptune's Daughter* (1914), a fantasy that shattered

attendance records of the time. In 1915, he directed Theda Bara in four features, including *Sin* and *Kreutzer Sonata*. A year later, Brenon made *War Brides*, which marked the screen debut of theater great Alla Nazimova.

In the mid-1920s, Brenon hit his stride. *The Spanish Dancer* (1923), starring Pola Negri, still stands out. As do two films most characteristic of the "Brenon style"—elaborate adaptations of two J.M. Barrie fantasies, *Peter Pan* (1924) and *A Kiss for Cinderella* (1925). Each were hugely popular. However, Brenon's greatest triumph was the dramatic *Beau Geste* (1926), starring Ronald Colman. It won the Photoplay Medal of Honor, one of the industry's first awards recognizing the best picture of the year. Brenon made two more big pictures that same year: *Dancing Mothers*, with Alice Joyce and Clara Bow, and *The Great Gatsby*, the first adaptation of F. Scott Fitzgerald's era-defining novel of the Jazz Age (now lost). Brenon's *Sorrell and Son* (1927) earned him a Best Director nomination at the first Academy Awards. His widely acclaimed *Laugh, Clown, Laugh* (1928), starring box-office favorite Lon Chaney, was his last silent release and is still screened today.

Brenon's *The Street of Forgotten Men* is a melodrama covered in grit. Though little known by



modern audiences, the film was well regarded upon its release in 1925. The National Board of Review named it one of the best pictures of the year, as did various newspapers, including the *San Francisco Call and Post*. *Exhibitor's Trade Review* reported that it was tied for fifth among the year's biggest moneymakers. In review after review, its director was praised for his realistic depiction of slum life, while leading man Percy Marmont's performance was repeatedly compared to Lon Chaney's star turn in *The Miracle Man* (1919).

Today, the film's obscurity likely stems from having been released between the two crowd-pleasing films for which Brenon remains best known, *Peter Pan* and *A Kiss for Cinderella*. Who wants dress when you can have glitter? The film's obscurity is also explained by it having been long out of circulation, and even thought lost, until 1970 when

six of its seven reels were acquired by the Library of Congress.

Based on an O. Henry-esque short story, *The Street of Forgotten Men* is an underworld romance set in New York's seedy Bowery district. Described at the time as "strange and startling" and "a drama of places and of people you have never seen before," the film tells the story of a gang of fake beggars whose headquarters is known as a "cripple factory." Led by the colorfully named Easy Money Charlie (Marmont), the gang preys on public sympathy by feigning disfiguring disabilities. *The Street of Forgotten Men* also tells the story of Mary Vanhern, played by winsome Mary Brian, whose link to these con artists is revealed while she's being courted by a young millionaire played by handsome Neil Hamilton (*Batman's* Commissioner Gordon from the 1960s television series).

In its review, New York's *Daily News* said, "*The Street of Forgotten Men* dips into the dark pools of life. It shows you the beggars of life—apologies to Jim Tully—and in showing them, it shows them up." The *San Francisco Bulletin* noted, "For fine dramatic detail, for unusualness, for giving us a glimpse into a world we never see and into the other sides of characters we simply pass in pity on the streets, *The Street of Forgotten Men* is a photoplay revelation."

Though the film is a sepia-toned look back at the Bowery of the 1890s, the *New York Times* ran a story in 1926 that the film may have inspired an actual group of fake beggars. "The police are investigating the speakeasy. It was recalled that several months ago a motion picture, *The Street of Forgotten Men* ... showed just such an establishment for equipping 'cripples' ... and the police thought the movie idea might have been put to practical use."

Its occasional outré subject matter aside, there is much to recommend in *The Street of Forgotten Men*. Notably, parts of the film were shot on location in New York City. One memorable scene—when Marmont and Brian's characters come across Bridgeport White-Eye (John Harrington)—was filmed on a busy Fifth Avenue near Saint Patrick's Cathedral. Shot with a concealed camera, these striking images of crowds passing on the street unaware (don't miss the vegetarian restaurant) are a vital part of the film's appeal.

Two performers not listed in the title credits also made their mark. One was a dog named Lassie. (This bull terrier-cocker spaniel mix predated the more famous collie.) A 1927 *New York Times* article about the canine reads, "It is said that the death of Lassie in *The Street of Forgotten Men* was so impressive that persons were convinced that she must have been cruelly beaten. Her master, Emery

Bronte, said that the dog seemed to enjoy acting in the scenes, and that after each 'take' she went over to Mr. Brenon and cocked her head on the side, as if asking for a pat or two." Regrettably, Lassie's dramatic death is among the lost footage.

Another performer who made an impression was Louise Brooks. She was dancing with the Ziegfeld Follies at the time and this bit-part is her cinematic debut. Her role as a moll is slight—she appears on screen for less than five minutes—but it drew the attention of a *Los Angeles Times* reviewer who mentions her, "And there was a little rowdy, obviously attached to the 'blind' man, who did some vital work during her few short scenes. She was not listed." These two sentences mark Brooks's first "movie review."

The Street of Forgotten Men is a characteristic entry in the Brenon canon, full of memorable characters and rich in detail, some of it self-referential, as when Mary Brian is seen playing the piano using sheet music from *Peter Pan*. Even missing its second reel, *The Street of Forgotten Men* remains a notable period piece, a testament to one of the great early directors.

— THOMAS GLADYSZ

THE BOWERY

by Fritzi Kramer

THERE are few neighborhoods more colorful or more ubiquitous in American silent and classic film than New York's Bowery; the Hollywood geography may be shaky but the swagger is unmistakable. This vibrant area of Manhattan captured the fancy of broader pop culture in the late 19th century, around the same time that the world was falling in love with motion pictures. In 1897, the Edison film company brought dancers to its famous Black Maria studio to perform a "Bowery Waltz"—both partners pretended to be fall-down drunk, leaning into one another as they danced. Not to be outdone, Biograph filmed a so-called "tough dance" in 1902, which pre-figured a Parisian Apache performance with a simulated fight and male hands firmly planted on his partner's derriere.

Dance hall scenes were an essential part of any Bowery entertainment. *The Musketeers of Pig Alley's* back alley duel was the direct result of Elmer Booth saving Lillian Gish from a spiked drink at such an establishment. Raoul Walsh's 1915 classic *Regeneration* was shot on location in the Bowery—the director's childhood stamping grounds—and the film's colorful background cast was the result of a local talent search, which likely netted more than a few authentic criminals. *Children of Eve*, released the same year, heavily borrows on the Triangle Shirt-waist fire of Greenwich Village for its story. One breathless magazine item described director John H. Collins buying his company's way into a genuine gangsters' dance in order to add authentic local color to Viola Dana's portrayal of twinkletoeed tough girl, Fifty-Fifty Mamie.

Allan Dwan later claimed his quest for gangster authenticity backfired in *Big Brother* (1923), when his hired wise guys misunderstood a command to remove the covers from the set lights: "Take the silks off the broads!" Chaos and a censorable amount of exposed flesh ensued. *The Street of Forgotten Men* might have had a much safer, movieland-recreated Bowery but earns its bona fides with a saloon called Diamond Mike's Dead House featuring a private dressing room for grifters.

Another iconic element of Bowery films was a gang of rascally tykes. Golden Age Hollywood series like the *Dead End Kids* and the *Bowery Boys* are still well-known to classic film fans but they were predated in movies by Mary Pickford's "Princess of the Bowery," Little Annie Rooney herself. Pickford, who wrote the screenplay under a pseudonym, surrounded her character with a multicultural gang of kids whose connections and command of multiple languages saved the day when they tracked down the killer of Pickford's police officer father.

The 1910 farce *The Troubles of a Policeman* also followed the adventures of a gang of Bowery kids, complete with tattered knickerbockers and newsie caps. When a cop interrupted their craps game and delivered a beating, the boys plotted revenge, tormenting their opponent until he vowed to never interfere with their play again. The same year, the drama *Clancy* made its Bowery cop the hero and he valiantly survived a beating at the hands of gangsters, returning home to his wife and child in time for the holidays.

Collisions between Bowery denizens and tony New York society were played for all they were



worth. Mary Brian's leap from child of the Bowery to genteel society was helped along by her devoted honest crook of a guardian in *The Street of Forgotten Men*. Norma Talmadge, no stranger to playing hard dames, took a trickier road to the upper crust in *A Daughter of Two Worlds*: her gangland character jumped bail and then attended boarding school, picking up posh manners in the bargain.

NORMA Shearer got to play it both ways in *Lady of the Night*: she was Molly, Queen of the Bowery, a taxi dancer—more, if viewers were fluent in double entendre—and she was also Florence, the pampered daughter of a judge. Shearer's brassy spit curls and tam bedecked with mile-high plumes in the role of Molly assured that the public would know the difference. Men of the Bowery also were allowed to reform, as William Haines did in *Little Annie Rooney* and Rockliffe Fellowes in *Regeneration*. Pat O'Malley played a brutal gangster commanding his own band of toughs in the lost Universal feature *Fools Highway*, which was based on the same source material as *Regeneration*. The love of a saintly Mary

Philbin made him change his ways in just seven reels.

It wasn't all drama. Cecil B. DeMille scored a hit early in his career with *Chimmie Fadden*. Victor Moore reprised his stage role as the title character, an amiable Irish-American whose rough manners were matched by his good heart and who found his place as the butterfingered but well-meaning servant of a wealthy family. The sequel, *Chimmie Fadden Out West*, took the culture shock a step further and sent the hero to the wilds of Death Valley and San Francisco, where his fast-talking charm won the day once again.

A reverse of the trope was found in the 1907 comedy *Rube Brown Goes to Town*, which followed the adventures of a New Jersey farm boy, whose dreams of the Bowery life were given a shock of cold water at the hands of pickpockets, con artists, and dishonest waiters. Keystone's biggest stars got into the act in the lost short *Bright Lights*. The finale shows country boy Roscoe "Fatty" Arbuckle desperately trying to save his equally bumpkin sweetheart, Mabel Normand, from the dance-hall hideout of Bowery traffickers.



THE HUNCHBACK OF NOTRE DAME

MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT BY MONT ALTO MOTION PICTURE ORCHESTRA

DIRECTED BY WALLACE WORSLEY, USA, 1923

CAST Lon Chaney, Pasty Ruth Miller, Norman Kerry, and Kate Lester **PRODUCTION** Universal Pictures Corp. **PRINT SOURCE** Universal Studios

Carl Laemmle, the founder and president of Universal Pictures, built his success on short, cheap but profitable films that could be packaged and sold to distributors at a modest price. Production costs on Universal's silent features rarely topped \$100,000 and many cost significantly less. The 1923 Universal release *The Shock*, starring Lon Chaney, cost a mere \$90,220 to make and earned an impressive \$257,327 at the box office. Universal classified their releases as Specials, Jewels, Junior Jewels, etc., as a way of letting distributors know whether a film was cheap, very cheap, or super cheap. However, on several occasions, the notoriously frugal Laemmle was convinced to splurge, leading to a handful of "Super Jewels," among them *Foolish Wives* (1922) and *The Phantom of the Opera* (1925).

Yet even these productions paled in comparison to the Universal Super Jewel *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, based on the classic 19th-century Victor Hugo novel set during the waning years of the Middle Ages. At a total cost of \$1.25 million, *Hunchback* was the second most expensive silent film Universal ever made, eclipsed only by *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1927), made for an astonishing \$1.7 million. Even the problem-plagued super hit *The Phantom of the Opera* only cost \$632,357. It was

Laemmle's twenty-three-year-old executive Irving G. Thalberg who convinced the studio head to take a chance on the project, and Thalberg insisted on casting Chaney in the lead role.

Lon Chaney began his career at Universal in 1912, making more than a hundred mostly low-budget films and getting paid \$35 a week. While he left in 1918 for greener pastures at Paramount, Goldwyn, and other studios, he returned to Universal throughout the early 1920s for a few one-offs, including *Outside the Law* (1921), *The Trap* (1922), and the aforementioned *The Shock* (1923). To lure him back once more for *Hunchback*, Thalberg offered him a weekly salary of \$2,500. Justifiably indignant at having been unvalued during his years at Universal, Chaney insisted on \$2,500 over and above his original salary—Universal relented and paid him \$2,535 a week.

Production ran from December 1922 to June 1923, an extraordinarily long schedule for the time, and the longest shoot of Chaney's career. The centerpiece of the film was an elaborate re-creation of the lower half of Notre Dame Cathedral. The illusion of the towers and upper part of the cathedral was created by a hanging miniature. Built on nineteen acres, the sets cost about \$500,000 in all to construct and included the Bastille and its

drawbridge, the castle and its gardens, and the Hôtel de Ville. (One of the set designers, Stephen Goosson, later designed Shangri-La for 1937's *Lost Horizon*.) They also re-created the streets of 15th-century Paris, hauling cobblestones from a river twenty miles away and setting them in cement. To dress the stars and more than twenty-five hundred extras about three thousand costumes were required, and the lot's wardrobe building had to be enlarged to handle all the additional items. Conspicuous extras were put on payroll two days early to get used to their period clothing. During the cast-of-thousands scenes, director Wallace Worsley spoke over the first public address system ever employed on a film production.

Worsley had already worked with Chaney on four other pictures, including *The Penalty* (1920) and the now-lost *A Blind Bargain* (1922). He also knew Chaney to be a competent director in his own right, having directed six Universal pictures in 1915, so Worsley let him direct several scenes in *Hunchback*. However, Chaney's primary concern was Quasimodo. To turn himself into the grotesque title role, Chaney spent three-and-a-half hours each day in the studio's Room No. 5 applying makeup and prosthetics that included a twenty-pound plaster for the hump. He later called Quasimodo, "the hardest part I ever played, that's all," as he found the extensive makeup a hindrance to creating a sympathetic character. Chaney used the same room for *The Phantom of the Opera*, and, in 1928, Jack Pierce, a longtime friend of Chaney's and head of makeup at Universal, commandeered it to make up Conrad Veidt for *The Man Who Laughs*, Boris Karloff for the *Frankenstein* and *Mummy* films, Bela Lugosi for *Dracula*, and Lon Chaney Jr. for *The Wolfman*, earning the room its nickname, the Bugaboudoir.

Hunchback premiered at New York's Astor Theatre on September 6, 1923, a week after a private screening held at Carnegie Hall as a benefit for veterans. While the film was an enormous hit, more than recouping Universal's costs, critics were divided. *Moving Picture World* described the film as "a motion picture masterpiece that belongs among the ten best ever produced." But *Variety's* reviewer was appalled, calling the film "a two-hour nightmare. It's murderous, hideous and repulsive. It is misery all of the time, nothing but misery, tiresome, loathsome misery."

In 1931, during leaner times, Universal considered a sound remake of the film to take advantage of the durable sets, which Laemmle had insisted be built solidly with an eye for future use. Bela Lugosi, Boris Karloff, Henry Hull, Peter Lorre, and Edward G. Robinson were all considered for the role of Quasimodo, but the Great Depression made financing impossible, and the project was scrapped. In 1939 RKO built new sets at the RKO Ranch in Encino for a version that starred Charles Laughton.

But the story of Universal's *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* doesn't end there. Released in a twelve-reel version for its premiere, the movie was immediately cut to ten reels for general release, and that shorter version is what exists today. *Hunchback* would have been entirely lost if not for Universal's Show-at-Home business in the '20s and '30s. For nontheatrical and educational distribution primarily at libraries and churches, Universal made 16mm prints and *Hunchback* was one of their most popular titles. It was so popular in fact that the main titles of the negative eventually became too tattered to print and Universal produced a set of replacement titles in a different typeface. The rest of the negative also showed substantial wear.



This well-worn 16mm print with new titles was all that was thought to survive and was the source of a 1959 Blackhawk Films negative that provided nearly every version of the film for decades. In the mid-1990s, the late David Shepard came across a different 16mm print, reduced from a 35mm dupe negative, which became the source for the best home video version currently available.

In 2014, I acquired the film library of the late Gordon Berkow, a legendary collector of rare silent films. His collection contained three hundred original Kodascope and Show-at-Home prints, including fourteen silent features that are not known to exist in any archive, as well as the missing reel of Laurel and Hardy's *The Battle of the Century*. In 1985 Gordon had offered me an original 16mm Show-at-Home print of *Hunchback*, with the replacement titles, and, at the time, I was surprised that he was selling such a rarity. Going through the

rest of his collection in 2014, I finally understood why he let it go. He also had a stunning Show-at-Home print made from the first negative, with all the original titles. That print is the basis of this new Universal restoration. Thanks to digital technology, the image has been stabilized and cleaned, much as Universal did for its recent restoration of Paul Leni's *The Last Warning* (1929).

The Hunchback of Notre Dame was one of the very first silent films to find its way to modern audiences. Many who grew up, like me, seeing their first silent films as part of Paul Killiam's PBS series in the early 1970s, might remember being enraptured by the fascinating, albeit fuzzy, images on the screen. Now with this magnificent new restoration, those of you who think you've seen it a hundred times will thrill as you watch it unfold for what is really your first time.

— JON C. MIRSA LIS



THE HISTORY OF THE CIVIL WAR

MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT BY ANVIL ORCHESTRA

DIRECTED BY DZIGA VERTOV, SOVIET RUSSIA, 1921

PRODUCTION All-Russia Film and Photo Division (VFKO) **ORIGINAL LANGUAGE TITLE** *Istoriya Grazhdanskoi Voyny* **PRINT SOURCE** Aerogroup and Grinberg Brothers

It's easy to forget that Dziga Vertov started his career, well before the other founders of Soviet cinema, as a chronicler of the Civil War precipitated by the Bolshevik coup of October 1917. The films that have kept his reputation alive, and indeed raised it above most others of his generation, belong mainly to the turn of the subsequent decade, 1928 to 1931, when Vertov had been forced out of Moscow and sought refuge in Ukraine. There, the VUFKU organization supported what are now his most-admired films, the highly experimental *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929) and his first sound film *Enthusiasm* (1931). Those attracted by the lively formalism of these pivotal works, once derided by the influential founding theorist of documentary John Grierson, have often been ignorant of what came before and unimpressed by the reportage-based work that was the bedrock of Vertov's achievement in the early 1920s.

Now, thanks to the dogged ingenuity of historian Nikolai Izvolov, who recently reconstructed Vertov's 1918 *Anniversary of the Revolution*, we have a second major work from this period, 1921's *The History of the Civil War (Istoriya Grazhdanskoi Voyny)*. Once again we can experience the barnstorming charisma of Trotsky—although to a somewhat lesser degree—before it was retroactively

censored in the Stalin era. Other historic figures, familiar at least by name, appear as well, notably Mikhail Kalinin, who went on to become the USSR's largely titular head of state until 1946. Back in 1920, Kalinin commanded the agit-train *October Revolution*, on which Vertov supervised film work, gained first-hand experience of how audiences responded to his films by showing his *Anniversary of the Revolution* (what he called "studying the new viewer"), and shot new material. For those who have only heard about this legendary propaganda initiative, as seen in Chris Marker's *And the Train Rolls On* and the installation at the British Film Institute's Museum of the Moving Image, *History of the Civil War* provides a glimpse of several of the trains, one painted in bold abstract livery, recalling the brief period when avant-garde art and Bolshevik propaganda worked in harmony.

For the most part, however, this is a record of now-forgotten local campaigns and battles that marked the merciless consolidation of Soviet power, and as such it makes uncomfortable (even unconscionable for some) viewing today, as we watch post-Soviet Russia brutally trying to subjugate Ukraine on our television screens. The "Vertov we know now"—as evoked by John MacKay in volume one of his magisterial 2018 biography *Dziga Vertov: Life and Work*—may be hard to discern for most

viewers. This is a Vertov triumphantly recording endless columns of marching soldiers, Red Cavalry detachments, captured artillery, railhead troop inspections.

Most disturbing today, perhaps, are sections that cover the crushing of dissent. One of these is the trial of the Cossack leader Filipp Mironov, who had distinguished himself in many campaigns against the White army of Anton Deniken before he claimed leadership of the Southern Front. He was arrested on behalf of the Revolutionary Military Council and his trial led to a death-sentence, which was only commuted at the last minute by Trotsky on the basis of his past service to the revolution. Vertov's film shows apparently reconstructed scenes of the trial and a smiling pardoned Mironov, but does not refer to his renewed military career and another arrest in 1921, followed by his death in mysterious circumstances, probably on the orders of Trotsky. This is of course a complex history, the details of which long remained hidden and disputed; but to watch Vertov's observational account is to be reminded of how ruthlessly Soviet history has been simplified from the outset.

Another substantial part of the film deals with the suppression of the Kronstadt mutiny, staged in the spring of 1921 by sailors, soldiers, and civilians in the port city near St. Petersburg. This was no counterrevolutionary White movement, like those led by Pyotr Wrangel (known as the Black Baron), Denikin, and others, but an uprising by ardent supporters of the revolution who felt they had been betrayed by Bolshevik authoritarianism. The rebels' fifteen demands included newly elected councils (or "soviets"), admission of a wider range of left-wing representation, and less governmental bureaucracy. Needless to say, none of these aspirations are reflected in Vertov's triumphalist account of the "crushing" of what is now usually described as a

rebellion rather than a mutiny. Here we might reflect with some irony on his film's earlier mention of the anniversary of the Paris Commune's suppression in 1871, already a hallowed, and conveniently distant date, in the Soviet calendar.

The "Vertov we know now" is predominantly a lyrical mourner of Lenin's legacy, the energetic celebrant of a USSR under construction, and the creator of a new poetics of nonfiction. He also comes down to us as something of a martyr, an increasingly isolated figure in Soviet cinema, battling to defend his vision of a self-sufficient nonfiction cinema against increased demands for engaging fiction. With both *Anniversary of a Revolution* and *The History of the Civil War*, Izvolov has done the valuable service of returning to us the earnest young propagandist we hardly knew. This is the Vertov who witnessed episodes of the Civil War as they unfolded, and who felt he had learned what worked for unsophisticated audiences by watching their reactions to his chronicle films along the agit-train routes. The Vertov of the stirring manifestos and the sweeping condemnation of his contemporaries, including Kuleshov and Eisenstein, still lies just over the horizon—although these experiences and, later, editing his Kino-Pravda series are what shaped him.

Our reaction to this resurrection will inevitably be complex. There is none of the self-referential play that endeared later Vertov to modernist and even postmodern avant-gardists. This is "chronicle," which Vertov scholars have long insisted cannot be equated with newsreel. MacKay suggests it should be considered "historicized or narrativized nonfiction," a cautious formulation that avoids engaging with how our interpretations of the events shown may differ from those offered by the filmmaker. The value of *History of the Civil War* is to return us to a moment in the frequently



brutal consolidation of Soviet power, when a "victorious end of the Civil War" could be declared; when future victims of Stalin such as Caucasus commanders Sergei Kirov and Sergo Ordzhonikidze could be seen smiling on screen as part of that victory; and when the victims of the Kronstadt massacre could be regarded as "a danger greater than Deniken and Wrangel," to use Lenin's words.

Viewers of Soviet-era film have long had to put aside the rhetoric and values often proclaimed so stridently, making allowances for the pressures on filmmakers to follow "the general line," as Eisenstein's ill-fated late 1920s film was originally titled before it became *The Old and the New*. Yet the challenge has never been more acute than watching this celebration of a century-old

victory amid daily reports of a modern Russian state invading a sovereign Ukraine. Arguably, it makes the "Vertov we know now" more complete, countering a more sentimental image, fostered by lyrical scenes of an Odessa summer in *Man with a Movie Camera* and heroic Donbas workers in *Enthusiasm*. Whether we approve or not, these barely remembered Civil War campaigns are the experiences that forged Vertov, and we can only be grateful to Nikolai Izvolov and his producers for their painstaking reconstruction. As archaeologists have long known, the evidence of the past is rarely comforting.

— IAN CHRISTIE

ANVIL ORCHESTRA STRIKES THE RIGHT CHORD

by Thomas Gladysz

Roger Miller wants to make a point. “I don’t think I would refer to our music for *The History of the Civil War* as background music. That’s what ‘normal’ soundtrack music is. It’s underneath the talking. For *History of the Civil War*, and for all silent film accompaniment, I’d call it ‘foreground music’—it takes the place of the talking and tells the story. And, that’s not counting the sound design!” Miller is one-half of the recently formed Anvil Orchestra, a musical duo (and sometimes trio) composed of himself and percussionist Terry Donahue. As two-thirds of the disbanded Alloy Orchestra, Miller and Donahue wanted to continue accompanying silent film in the bold manner set forth by their old ensemble.

WHAT’S IN A NAME

Roger Ebert once called Alloy “The best in the world,” and unwittingly provided the group that sprang from it their new name. Years ago, when Alloy Orchestra first played Ebertfest, the famed critic mistakenly introduced Alloy as the Anvil Orchestra. When Miller and Donahue were looking to name their new group, Ebert’s “creative word-play” came to mind. In the same way that “Alloy” did, “Anvil” evokes a brash, original, striking sound, at times percussive, rhythmic, metallic, and even industrial.

That musical accompaniment can act as a bridge between the film and the audience is something Donahue and Miller agree on. “The soundtrack to a film, whether it be silent or a talkie, is incredibly important,” explains Donahue. “The two, when done well, are completely intertwined. The wrong score can destroy even the best film. In live performances, our goal is to hope that the audience forgets that we’re there.” Miller puts it a bit differently, saying music can help “translate” a silent film. “When it works, it should clarify the emotions and underlying meaning, even if the audience doesn’t realize it. In non-silent film, a lot of that is done with the tone of talking, and the type of sound design behind the film.”

WHAT’S IN A GENRE

One of the films for which Alloy Orchestra was best known for accompanying is Dziga Vertov’s

avant-garde documentary from 1929, *Man with a Movie Camera*. It’s fitting then for their debut at SFSFF Anvil is playing for another work by Vertov, an earlier documentary, from 1921, *The History of the Civil War*. An unvarnished look at a country in chaos, it records the time when Bolsheviks struggled to defeat domestic opposition to its revolution.

How did Anvil go about composing a score for *The History of the Civil War*, which resembles a more traditional documentary? Donahue says there are “different challenges to documentaries than there are to narrative films. In narrative films the characters help to lead us where we’re going. In documentaries, you have to see the broader picture and try to use the music to tell the audience what’s happening.”

Miller agrees. “This film was quite hard to sort out at first. It’s less linear than *Man with a Movie Camera*. Luckily, we had Nikolai Izvolov, who directed the restoration, to help us out. It was initially shot to be shown in fragments, newsreel style. From cut to cut, there is often little development. It was a bit jarring and hard to get a grip on sometimes—not like Buster Keaton saving the day after many travails! Again, Nikolai was very helpful in explaining some of the nuances. We had to go back and correct a few scenes. What looked like just more desolation and destruction was actually a victory for the Soviets—



so instead of doom ambience, we gave it a more positive feel. This helps explain the film better but was not obvious from just watching it.”

WHAT’S THAT SOUND?

Miller wants to make another point. “Regarding ‘sound design’ in our work,” he explains, “That’s more sound effects, maybe gongs for wind, the keyboard playing an electronic sound that melts downward in the *Civil War* scene where they are smelting metal. Tom-toms strong when horses come in, and unusual metal and percussion when tanks are being driven. Those things are what would be ‘sound design’ in modern film scoring—more likely created with real sounds from the world than musical instruments or a live band. That stuff is really fun to create in silent film.

“Sometimes the best thing to do, actually, is the opposite of what’s on the screen. That can be effective. But generally, we try to underline the primary aspect of what’s on the screen. When the soldiers are charging forward, you can be sure we’ll be playing strong rhythmic music to help tell that story. But it’s a fine line between giving too much away and

not saying enough. Sometimes overt bombast is perfect—sometimes better to play as little as possible.”

“We believe our function as composers and performers is to accompany, embody, sometimes enhance, and yes, to elucidate,” Donahue says. “When scoring, we try to find the feel, or emotion of a scene.”

When asked what viewers could expect to hear during *The History of the Civil War*, the two musicians gave complementary answers. Donahue notes, “Our scores try to put you into the film. Audiences can expect a similar energy to what we’ve done in the past. With thirty years of experience to fall back on. Energy, but control. A combination of melodic folk, eerie atmosphere, and grandiose music.” Miller agrees, adding “A pretty lively set of music! And a lot of different moods. But, as we have always done, keep that diversity sounding like a cohesive ensemble. It went over quite well at IDFA in Amsterdam—the director of the Toronto Film Festival said she was so emotionally caught up in the music that it was hard to keep from crying (and she meant that in a good way).”



SMOULDERING FIRES

MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT BY STEPHEN HORNE

DIRECTED BY CLARENCE BROWN, USA, 1925

CAST Pauline Frederick, Laura La Plante, Malcolm McGregor, Tully Marshall, and Wanda Hawley

PRODUCTION Universal Pictures Corp. PRINT SOURCE UCLA Film and Television Archive

Having been greatly impressed by Clarence Brown's *The Goose Woman*, which I found in 1962 in a British film library, I searched for more silent films by this remarkable director. Thanks to the British Film Institute's John Huntley, *Smouldering Fires* came from overseas (an ostrich farm outside Johannesburg, South Africa!). It was more elaborately tinted than any film I'd seen, but then Brown's mentor, Maurice Tourneur, was a tinting fanatic.

The title suggests a lurid melodrama, but the film turned out to be, if not quite feminist, at least an intelligent, poignant, and beautifully photographed story about a forty-year-old woman in charge of a garment factory she inherited from her father. It opens with a meeting of department heads, as wittily observed as anything by Lubitsch. Jane Vale (Pauline Frederick), called "The Iron Woman" in the script (after the Margaret Deland novel on which it is loosely based), dresses in mannish clothes and behaves distantly to her employees. However, one young man, Robert Elliott (Malcolm McGregor), attracts her with his forthright views. She hires him as assistant manager and then grows attached. Factory-floor gossip about their relationship pressures Elliott into hastily proposing marriage, but when Jane's younger sister, Dorothy (Laura La Plante), returns from college, she and Elliott fall for each other. They are ready to sacrifice their love for

Jane's sake, but Jane is already apprehensive about the age difference

In 1965, Clarence Brown was still alive but proved hard to locate. I sent a letter in care of the Screen Directors Guild but heard nothing. Months later, I received a phone call from Thomas Quinn Curtiss, drama critic of the *Paris Herald-Tribune* and a friend of Brown's. He came straight to the point; was it true that I had found *The Goose Woman*? He invited me to his hotel, the Savoy—"and bring the movie!" I realized this was to be a screening process in both senses. Fortunately he was greatly impressed and revealed that Brown was in Paris, visiting the Motor Show. I raced over to another grand hotel, the Georges V. Clarence Brown was understandably suspicious of me—this was the era when reporters from *Confidential* magazine pulled all sorts of tricks to get scandals from celebrities and, as Garbo's favorite director, Brown was in the firing line.

He was stocky and tough and resembled an oil tycoon, friendly enough, but it took a lot of effort to persuade him to talk. He didn't like the tape recorder so I had to hold the microphone under the table during meals and eat with one hand. Luckily, he didn't notice but I couldn't miss this historic opportunity. I had lugged a projector over but discovered to my embarrassment that it wouldn't work on French voltage. This proved a blessing in disguise because we talked and talked



and TALKED. I telephoned Henri Langlois, who ran the Cinémathèque Française, and told him of my predicament. He invited us to come next morning to his cinema at Palais de Chaillot. *The Goose Woman* looked marvelous on the huge screen and at the end Brown looked at me in genuine surprise and said, "I didn't know I was that good." In a generous gesture, Langlois brought from his collection a 35mm print from the camera negative of *The Last of the Mohicans* (1920), most of which Brown had directed after Tourneur had injured himself. "Tourneur was my god," he said. "I owe him everything I've got in the world. For me, he was the greatest man who ever lived."

Born in Clinton, Massachusetts, in 1890, Clarence Brown was the son of a cotton manufacturer. His family moved to the South when he was eleven. He went to the University of Tennessee and graduated with two degrees in engineering. His father wanted him to enter the cotton business, but around 1914

his passion for cars caused him to leave home to work for automobile companies. He used to spend his lunch hours watching movies, the output of four directors from the Peerless Studio impressing him so much that he left his job and traveled to Fort Lee, New Jersey, to meet one of these directors—and it's our good fortune that he met Maurice Tourneur. Tourneur had emigrated from France and had just fired his assistant. He hired Brown, who learned so rapidly that within a month he was editing Tourneur's pictures and writing the titles. "Because Tourneur hated exteriors," Brown told me, "I worked the rest of the time doing exteriors with my own cameraman." Having made his first feature, *The Great Redeemer* in 1919, Brown left Tourneur to work with producer Jules Brulatour, directing Lon Chaney in *The Light in the Dark* (1922)—"It was a dog. Don't let's talk about it." He signed a contract with Universal and made five hits in a row: *The Acquittal*, *The Signal Tower*, *Butterfly*, *Smouldering Fires*, and *The Goose Woman*.

Brown said that at the beginning of production Pauline Frederick went through the worst attack of stage fright he had ever witnessed. "She had been a great Broadway star and had made a number of pictures. Her last real success had been *Madame X* [Frank Lloyd, 1920]. The first two days on this one I thought she was going to give up. But she was a great artist and pulled through bravely." To shoot the film's mountain getaway, Brown took his company to Yosemite, a location for much of *The Last of the Mohicans*. When the cameraman found a tree obscuring a spectacular vista and the forest ranger wouldn't allow it to be chopped down, Brown persuaded his now confident leading lady to romance the man until he agreed.

"It was *Smouldering Fires* that got me my contract with Norma Talmadge," recalled Brown at the George V. "[Producer] John Considine was working with Joe Schenck. One night he dropped into the Forum Theatre, Los Angeles. He didn't even know what picture was playing. He came in after the titles and thought Lubitsch had made it until he saw the credit 'A Clarence Brown production, directed by Clarence Brown.' He called me on the phone the next day and started talking about a contract. I think I got \$12,500 for the five pictures I made at Universal. I jumped to \$3,000 a week with Schenck."

Laura La Plante, whom I met in Palm Springs, had acquired a 16mm print of *Smouldering Fires* while working at Warner Bros. in England in the 1930s. Had she not been excited by it? "Not particularly," she said. I urged her to screen it. She did so right then and there. I was dismayed to find that this was the foreign version. It was the same film, and yet for some reason it was nowhere near as powerful. I have seen many European versions of American silents and seldom have they been as effective as the domestic version. This was often because of the

use of second (i.e., inferior) takes for the foreign negative, but in this case Bob Gitt, who restored the film for the Packard Humanities Institute, assured me that two cameras, set up rigidly side by side, were used for practically every shot. The photography was by Jackson J. Rose, the man who wrote the renowned manual for cameramen, *American Cinematographer Handbook and Reference Guide* (nine editions published 1935–1960), and world-famous as "The Jackson Rose."

Perhaps the most touching performance came from the much-loved veteran character actor Tully Marshall, who was prominent as the forgetful trapper in *The Covered Wagon* (1923) and the repellent husband in Stroheim's *Queen Kelly* (1928). He later appeared with Garbo in *Grand Hotel* and Jean Harlow in *Red Dust* (both 1932).

The outstanding British director Anthony Asquith was a fervent admirer of Pauline Frederick and this film in particular. *Smouldering Fires* was also one of the first films to be reviewed by Graham Greene. (He tried to impress its moral of "marry someone your own age" on his still reluctant fiancée!) *Film Daily* called it "an unusually fine picture, exceptionally well handled and splendidly directed ... one of the most entertaining pictures Universal ever released." It was remade (without acknowledgment) as *Female*, directed for Warner Bros. by Michael Curtiz in 1933, with Ruth Chatterton and George Brent. This one ended with the Jane Vale character assuring her husband that he would run the factory (automobiles, this time) while she would stay at home to look after the children.

— KEVIN BROWNLOW



SALT FOR SVANETIA

MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT BY THE MATTI BYE ENSEMBLE

DIRECTED BY MIKHAIL KALATOZOV, SOVIET GEORGIA, 1930

PRODUCTION Sakhkinmretsvi ORIGINAL LANGUAGE TITLE *Jim Shuante*

PRINT SOURCE Niles Essanay Silent Film Museum

PRECEDED BY TEN MINUTES IN THE MORNING (DILIS ATI TSUTI)

For more than forty years Mikhail Kalatozov (Mikheil Kalatozishvili) had a film career marked by the highest of highs and the lowest of lows. From his work in the early 1930s that earned him a place in the doghouse of Soviet officialdom to the glorious achievement of winning the Palme d'Or at Cannes in 1958.

In the late 1920s the film studio in his native Georgia underwent a major shakeup as the stodgy old-timers were ousted and fresher minds were brought in from Moscow. The preeminent cinema pedagogue and filmmaker Lev Kuleshov came in to develop projects. The poet, journalist, and dramatist Sergei Tretyakov was developing scripts, with literary theorist and screenwriter Viktor Shklovsky entering the mix. The three had a strong affinity in their formalist approach to cinema and literature, one which strongly appealed to Kalatozov.

Working with Kuleshov, Kalatozov learned in greater depth the craft of cinema as a cameraman and screenwriter at Tbilisi. Together they made a few short newsreels and Kuleshov was mightily impressed with the twenty-six-year-old. "Kalatozov showed his brilliant technique as a cameraman," writes Kuleshov in his memoirs, "even in ... seemingly unappealing and unphotogenic films." After studying under pioneering editor and filmmaker Esfir Shub, Kalatozov's first credit was

the compilation documentary *Their Empire* (1928), codirected with Nutsa Ghoghoberidze.

At the same time Tretyakov was developing ideas about his fascination with the Svan people of northwestern Georgia, an isolated tribal society completely out of step with the efforts of the Soviet Union to bring its many ethnic groups into modern civilization. Tretyakov's interest led him to write articles, essays, and a 1929 script for *The Blind Woman*, a drama about an orphan living in a wealthy Svaneti home. Kalatozov directed the film, but it was condemned for "formalism" and never released.

In 1930 Kalatozov got his first important directing opportunity with *Salt for Svanetia* (*Jim Shuante*) and also served as the director of photography. The script was by Tretyakov again. It was intended to be a work of fiction and incorporated some footage from *The Blind Woman*. However, responding to Party expectations, the result, as edited by Shklovsky, was an ethnographic documentary. The expectations included that the film should promote Stalin's first Five Year Plan (1928-32) of development.

This ethnographic documentary was unlike any ever seen before. This early in his career Kalatozov was much too ambitious artistically to conjure

anything routine. Instead he painted a tragic picture of an exotic, long-suffering people, often given to extravagant, self-destructive behavior under the influence of long-held religious practices. In order to tell a story that reached greater depths of emotion, Kalatozov used techniques borrowed from Soviet filmmakers like Eisenstein, with stunning compositions, Dutch angles, as well as the use of nonprofessional Svan actors to represent the physical types that would conjure the primitive texture he sought.

At an altitude of six thousand feet, the land of Svanetia, along the Enguri River, was cut off from the world by mountains and glaciers, an ice palace with eight months of snowfall a year. During filming, there was a snowstorm on a hot day in July that nearly destroyed the local crops. But the defiant Svans prized the independence that came from isolation. They had built durable stone lookout towers and fortresses in the 10th century as a defense system against the land barons who looted the valley and imposed onerous taxes on the Svan throughout the tsarist era.

Kalatozov shows the Svan grazing livestock in their pastures and growing barley in their fields. Mainly subsistence farmers, some go to the valley on foot



to work. Having no roads, they also did not use wheels. They are shown threshing the grain they grow and gathering wool from their flock of sheep to make yarn, all using the most primitive methods. They make their own clothing.

But one thing above all characterizes their impoverishment: They have no local source for salt, which most of us take for granted. In raising livestock this is a colossal problem, for the sheep, goats, and cows can produce very little milk without it. The precious commodity (compared to gold in the intertitles) must be imported in small amounts carried on their backs by migrant workers returning from work in the valley, but there is never enough.

The response to a death in the community reveals the backward traditions attributed to the Svan, including animal sacrifice. A pregnant woman is about to give birth, which is taboo during a funeral and for which she is ostracized, with tragic consequences. With no roads to seek medical care, “pregnancy is a curse,” reads an intertitle. One tragedy piles upon another.

As part of the Five Year Plan, the government is building a road that will be the first step in ending their beleaguered isolation. As the movie tells us, a crew of strong young men with pickaxes, dynamite, and tractors, have been working three years to build the first fifty kilometers.

Kalatozov was criticized again for an excessive attention to form and for overplaying the backwardness of the Svan, and even of having invented some aspects of their life for dramatic impact. And, no doubt, for limiting the heroic role of the Soviet government to a few minutes at the end of the film. He got another chance to make a film, 1932’s *Nail in the*

Salt for Svanetia

Boot, which was criticized even more severely. He withdrew from directing and did not get another filmmaking opportunity until 1939. In subsequent years, nonetheless, *Salt for Svanetia* has grown in stature, earning high praise from Andrei Tarkovsky. Film scholar Jay Leyda called it “the most powerful documentary film I have ever seen.”

The times no longer favored daring cinematic experimentation. In the late 1920s the Stalinist bureaucracy had consolidated its stranglehold on the country. Their misguided, often cruel, policies led to the disaster of forced collectivization at home and historic defeats in Britain and China abroad.

In the early years after the Russian Revolution, ferment thrived among artists, especially in cinema, with Futurists, Formalists, Constructivists, Socialist Realists, and numerous others proclaiming themselves to be the genuine proletarian art. The Bolsheviks resisted the pressure to give any school of thought an official endorsement, allowing experimentation to flourish. But in the early 1930s the government found it convenient to decree socialist realism the only acceptable style of art, the more easily to control the realm of ideas.

Soviet filmmakers adapted as best they could in order to keep working, with Kalatozov relegated to production positions at various studios. It wasn’t until after the death of Stalin in 1953 that a new period of openness and relaxation of art policies was ushered in and Kalatozov had another chance to fully realize his vision. He found a new collaborator in the brilliantly innovative cinematographer Sergei Urusevsky. Their 1964 collaboration *I Am Cuba*, rediscovered in the 1990s, is now seen as an unparalleled achievement in visual storytelling, using exponentially more extravagant “emotional camera” techniques that can be traced back to *Salt for Svanetia*.

But Kalatozov’s greatest moment and cinematic redemption came with the Cannes Film Festival bestowing its most prestigious award on his deeply moving condemnation of war, *The Cranes Are Flying*, released October 12, 1957, even as Sputnik circled the Earth overhead.

— MIGUEL PENDÁS



TEN MINUTES IN THE MORNING (DILIS ATI TSUTI)

Director of this Kulturfilm Georgian filmmaker Aleqsandre Jaliashvili was also an actor who had appeared in Kalatozov’s *The Blind Girl* and *Nail in the Boot*, both of which had been suppressed for not conforming to the Party’s often obtuse directives on cinema. The release of Kulturfilms was part of the government’s aim to mold good Bolsheviks, as the young sprawling nation tried to modernize its economy and educate its citizens across diverse languages, geographies, and cultures. While the degree of control the Soviets sought over its peoples and the methods they used to attain it were often sinister, this strident encouragement to take a few minutes each day to get fit in order to better face the challenges ahead seems as good an idea to us now as it did to the Party back then. —Editor

THE NEW KINO

by Harry A. Potamkin

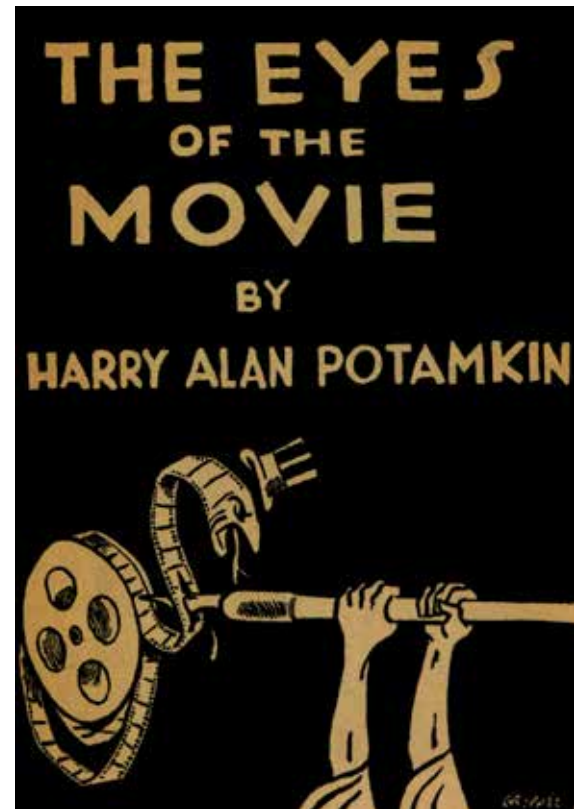
Another guarantee of the future of the Soviet kino is its several centres. Hollywood persists as a vested interest miles away from the critical centre of America. The Soviet film accords with the cultural autonomy of the various republics and peoples, Caucasian films, Georgian films, Armenian, Jewish, Ukrainian, Mongol ... from the areas these films come the students of the cinema school and the new directors. There's Kalveridzé, a Georgian; another Georgian is Mikhail Kalatozov, whose social training began as an economist and cinematic as a cameraman. Kalatozov has just made his first picture as a creator. I saw it before the last touches. Pearl Attashev has written to me that the film has received a first class pass from the censor.

Salt of Swanetia is an ethnographic film. It presents a new approach to ethnographic material. The Soviet Union utilizes the film documenting the lives of its minority people as a call to action on their behalf. Swanetia is the salt-less land in Asiatic Russia. It is a land of darkness and malaria and blood hemorrhages, and land where "death is a holiday and birth a sorrow." Tretyakov, author of *Roar, China!*, prepared the original scenario for the film. Kalatozov went at it his own way. The difference seems to be one of stress. Should Kalatozov have stressed the quotidian facts, or was he right in having constructed an experience on peaks of pathos? The choice having been made, we can view its execution. The ethnographic film has had its literal and factual day, it seems to me. We have awaited a non-fabricated, yet dramatic, enactment of the life of remote people. Not a

simple-minded and charming *Chang*—it exposes nothing. But a film satisfying the social sense, a film making demands upon the active conscience. The romanticized document like *Chang* concentrates a tale around a personality to the disadvantage of the evidences of native life. It is, like Flaherty's lovely lyrics, *Nanook and Moana*, too pleasant, too "open-minded." Kalatozov has uncovered the dramatic human heart of the evidences without destroying the ethnographic value of the document.

Kalatozov has established his point-of-view at once in the bold image and stern grand angles. The film, in these, is related to Dreyer's *The Passion of Joan of Arc*, but being a film of immediate pathos, rather than one of objective tragedy, *Salt of Swanetia* is a structure of greater liquidity and darker, more somber tones. It is unrelenting in its exposure of the dread life of the Swans, exploited and hopeless, incarcerated by the mountains. The funeral of the tuberculosis victim is excruciating in its dire grief. The widow, dripping her milk into the grave, condemns the collusion of paganism and christianity conspiring against human happiness. "We will not give our milk to the grave," the women cry in revolt. The film calls, and we respond: "These people must be saved—roads and salt!" The last part shouting this slogan directly is a weak addendum—the entire film cries that convincingly enough. Yet perhaps we must be told that the response is acting, that a road being built to lead Swanetia to the world, and the world to Swanetia.

Eisenstein has spoken of "the pathetic treatment of non-pathetic material." There is also the

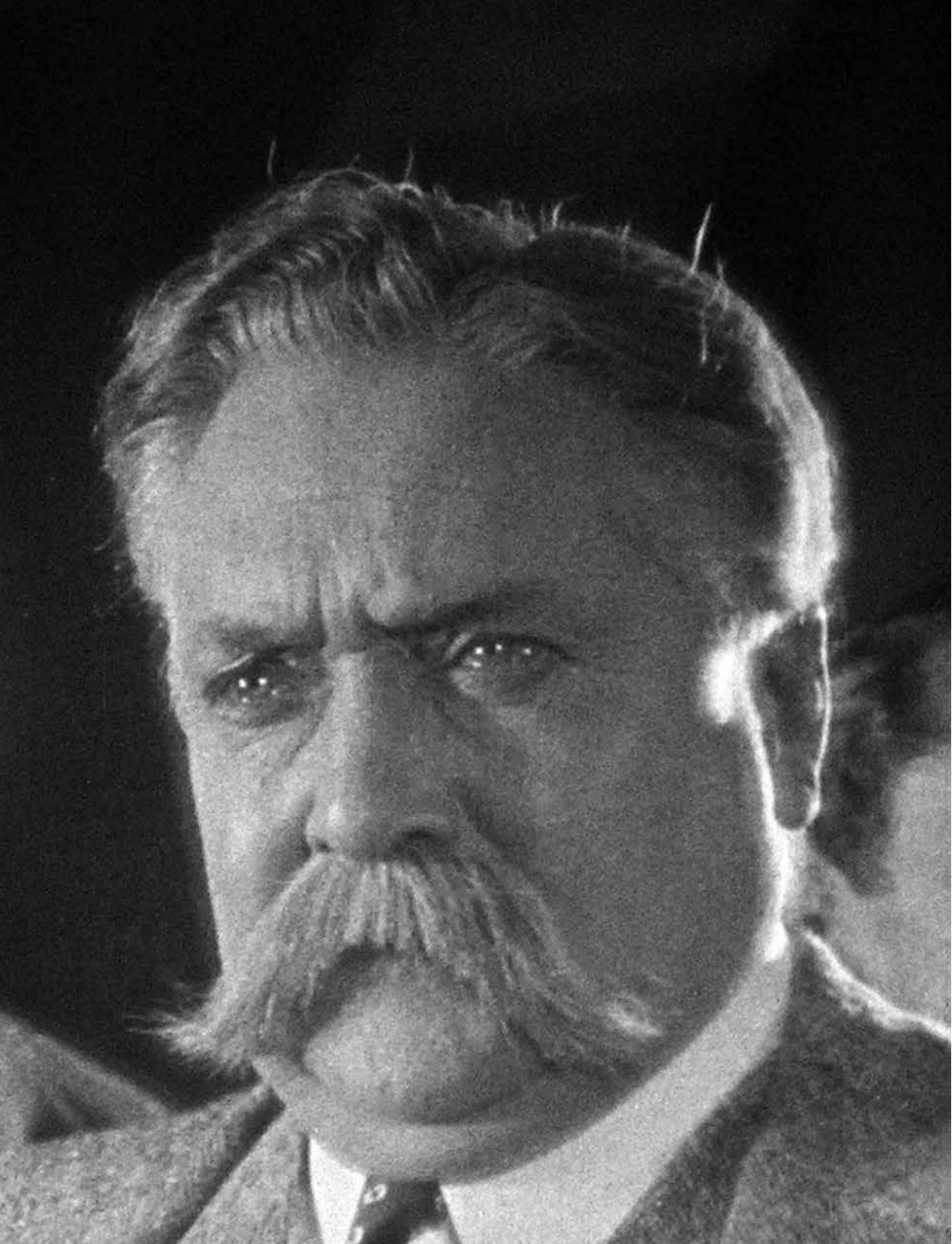


non-pathetic treatment of pathetic material. The question arises: shall pathos be stressed by the pathetic treatment? I think Kalatozov has answered that. If the pathetic treatment conveys more than sympathy, that is, evokes a positive conduct, and if that treatment informs the film from beginning to end, it is valid. Ordinarily it is sentimentality to treat pathos with pathos; it is over-treatment. But from the opening with the first mountain-peak to the beginning of the epilogue, Kalatozov's attitude is constant in the structure. Such conversion of an idea into a form is the full process and achievement of art.

Excerpted from the March 1931 issue of *Close Up* magazine.

ABOUT HARRY A. POTAMKIN

Poet and critic Harry Alan Potamkin was raised in Philadelphia by immigrant parents who had fled the Russian Empire. A stint among New Jersey anarchists drew the NYU graduate to social work, where he developed a program of "educational play" for children. Poetry was his chosen art form, however, and his focus on big injustices of the day caught the eye of W.E.B. Du Bois, who published Potamkin's work. On honeymoon in Paris in 1926 he saw the experimental motion pictures of the French and Soviet avant-garde and, according to Stephen Broomer, "was reborn alongside the arrival of *The Battleship Potemkin*." He stayed there until 1929 and began writing about movies as an art for niche literary journals. He had already taken to heart the Bolshevik mission to create a world that benefited its workers and found a way to combine his activism with his love of film when he returned home. Among other things he helped found New York's Film and Photo League for, in his words, "the encouragement support and sustenance of the left critic and the left movie-maker who is documenting dramatically and persuasively the disproportions of our present society." Potamkin died in 1933, when he was only thirty-three years old, before he could clearly see the monstrosity wrought from the revolution. But his critiques of the Hollywood film factory remain spot on. His "The Eyes of the Movie" pamphlet begins, "The movie was born in the laboratory and raised in the counting house" Notes: In the first paragraph, Potamkin probably means Ivan Kavaleridze by Kalveridzé, who was Ukrainian. Mikhail Kalatozov's first film was a compilation work made with Nutsa Ghoghoberidze. Pearl Attasheva, or Pera Atasheva, was Eisenstein's wife. — Editor



THE DIVINE VOYAGE

MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT BY GUENTER BUCHWALD AND FRANK BOCKIUS

DIRECTED BY JULIEN DUVIVIER, FRANCE, 1929

CAST Henry Krauss, Suzanne Christy, Jean Murat, Line Noro, Thomy Bourdelle, and Louis Kerly

PRODUCTION Le Film d'Art **ORIGINAL LANGUAGE TITLE** *La Divine Croisière* **PRINT SOURCE** Lobster Films

Julien Duvivier is the forgotten man of French cinema. Prolific and bad-tempered, nicknamed "Julien-le-mal-aimé" (Julien the unloved), he careened from genre to genre, making thrillers, noirs, comedies, melodramas, and religious films during an almost fifty-year career of nonstop film production, leaving behind nearly seventy films when he died in 1967 after wrapping the tepid thriller, *Diabolically Yours*. By then his reputation was already in the toilet; the *Cahiers du Cinéma* crowd had trashed him as an outmoded, commercial hack in the 1950s, using Duvivier's genre-hopping and prodigious output as evidence that he lacked an auteur's vision.

How quickly audiences forget. Travel back in time to 1929 when Duvivier made *The Divine Voyage* (*La Divine Croisière*) and we find critics calling him "one of the top French directors," an assessment that journalists echoed for the next decade or so as Duvivier made classics like *Pépé le Moko* and was fêted, honored, and interviewed. His renown reached Hollywood, where he was invited to direct in 1938 by MGM on the strength of his recent hit *Un Carnet de Bal*, and where he returned to make movies as a World War II refugee. At a party in Duvivier's honor during his first visit to Hollywood, King Vidor called him "a director in the proper sense of the term; you see his stamp on all his productions." Take that *Cahiers*!

The *mal-aimé* director has since made a posthumous comeback. Prompted by screenings marking his one hundredth birthday, biographers and historians began to re-evaluate Duvivier's films; *The Divine Voyage*, in particular, is ready for its close-up. Long believed lost, the rediscovered *Voyage*, with its unusual combination of religion and rabble-rousing, is an often overlooked entry in the crowded field of Duvivier silents: nineteen films in eleven years, three in 1929 alone. Critics tend to gravitate toward the audience-pleasing pathos of *Poil de Carotte* (1925), Duvivier's personal favorite of his silent era work, or the jazzy pyrotechnics of his final silent, *Au Bonheur des Dames* (1930). Yet in many ways *Voyage* is classic Duvivier: assembled with technical mastery, peppered with extravagant plot twists, its sentimental storyline mined with casual cruelty.

The film starts with a literal bang: the barrel of a gun rises up over a windowsill, and we are immediately plunged into the action. Rich and powerful Ferjac (Henry Krauss) is an unscrupulous shipowner who tyrannizes his seaside Breton village and is both resented and feared by the villagers. The failed assassination attempt interrupts a meeting between Ferjac and a delegation of sailors who refuse to set sail in his dilapidated vessel, *La Cordillière*. Accompanying them as intermediary is the poor but aristocratic captain, Jacques de Saint-Ermont (Jean Murat), who is (of

course!) in love with Ferjac's daughter Simone (Belgian star Suzanne Christy), a saintly antithesis to her cruel father. Ferjac ruthlessly quashes the sailors' nascent rebellion: "You really want to starve?" he sneers.

Duvivier wrote the scenario, smuggling a critique of capitalism into an overstuffed, but nonetheless wildly entertaining melodrama on the power of faith, a theme he explored in several films, both silent and sound. This eclectic excess was exactly what Duvivier's later detractors disliked about his films, but the energy of Duvivier's camera and cutting make it work, all of it—subplots featuring orphans and kindly priests, forced engagements, murder, mutiny, and a visitation from the Virgin Mary. Historian Noël Herpe has pointed out Duvivier's fondness for escalating plot tensions into not one but a series of climaxes—the more the better. In *Divine Voyage* he splits the narrative into two, cross-cutting between the mariners' perilous voyage and the bubbling rebellion of the villagers back on land. This dual narrative allows the director two of everything—two frenzied battles between opposing sides, two fires, two reunions. It's a narrative strategy that looks forward to the "sketch" films Duvivier became known for like *Carnet du Bal* (1937) and *Flesh and Fantasy* (1942), multiple stories with a loose framing device.

Filmmaking was Duvivier's second choice after an unsuccessful attempt at theater acting. Once he made the switch, however, he gave the new medium his all. He served as assistant to André Antoine on several productions and made his first film, *Haceldama* or *The Price of Blood*, in 1919. Then twenty-three, the novice director also wrote and sometimes shot (his camera operator was busy keeping the location electricity flowing). "Not only did we make the film but we developed it," Duvivier reminisced later. "It was a heroic epoch." Historian

Lenny Borger called *Haceldama* "one of the most dismal debuts by a great director," but trying things and making mistakes was part of Duvivier's process. Throughout his career he experimented, and also stole from those he admired—first Eisenstein's editing and Jean Epstein's superimpositions, then later trading cast, crew, and technique with Orson Welles.

By 1925 Duvivier had blended what he borrowed into his own style. He favored location shooting like Antoine did, and in 1924 he even used hidden cameras to capture his actors mingling with crowds of the faithful at Lourdes for *Credo, or the Tragedy of Lourdes*. In the summer of 1928 *Voyage's* cast and crew traveled to Paimpol in Brittany, where Duvivier shot in swamps and aboard ship while camera operator Thirard hiccuped with seasickness as he cranked the camera. Yet Duvivier also embraced artifice, telling a journalist that the best storms were made in the convenience of the studio. He was an enthusiast of the Hall process, the use of painted plywood cutouts placed in front of the camera to augment a set or location. For *Voyage's* climactic fire scene, Duvivier combined location and artifice, "planting" a forest of logs on Ermenonville's sands and then burning it down while locals watched.

Duvivier uses all these tools and more to create stunning sequences in *The Divine Voyage* that still pack an emotional wallop today. In one scene angry villagers invade Ferjac's chateau where he's hosting a grand celebration of his daughter's engagement. The confrontation unfolds organically, stopping and stalling, as Duvivier cuts fluidly between different angles, rhythmically mixing wide and tight shots. The traveling shot was a Duvivier hallmark, and here the camera glides the length of the lavishly set table and even seems to briefly float over the action. Some guests retreat from

the conflict, while others advance to confront the villagers, who hesitate as well, until the camera goes tight on Ferjac as he swipes off a villager's cap—and the battle is on. The film is full of vivid imagery, from the shadowed close-ups of the craggy-faced Bretons, to the black silhouette of a man emerging from a white cloud of smoke, and the Busby Berkeley-esque overhead shot of a sailor spinning within a circle of white-coiffed women, all trying to embrace him at once.

Much has been made of Duvivier's faith, or his loss of it. Even his films with no overt religious content routinely depict falls from grace and crucifixions with no resurrection, as in 1946's *Panique*. Ultimately his films (comedies included) focus on the cruelty of human nature, the many ways humans have for screwing each other over. It's a misanthropic, misogynistic, melancholy, bleak worldview, one that critics sometimes blame on his grim childhood, his Catholicism, or both. "I know it is much easier to make films that are poetic, sweet, charming, and beautifully photographed,"

Duvivier once said, "but my nature pushes me towards harsh, dark and bitter material." Whatever the roots of this attraction, the result is Duvivier's reputation as "cinéaste du noirceur," the filmmaker of darkness.

The Divine Voyage both reinforces and complicates this reputation. While in his bleakest film, *Panique*, Duvivier pits the lone outsider against the ignorant and vicious crowd, in *Voyage*, the dynamic is reversed; the close-knit Breton community rebels against lone tyrants like Kerjac and the bullying mutinous sailor Mareuil. Most significantly, in *Voyage* the villagers prevail, the lost sailors return. The moment when Kerjac falls to his knees and bares his head provides genuine catharsis and a rare glimpse of Duvivier's closeted optimism. Noël Herpe calls Duvivier "a tender soul who distrusted tenderness." Watching *The Divine Voyage* we catch Duvivier before the distrust and darkness completely descend.

— MONICA NOLAN



Suzanne Christy



LADY WINDERMERE'S FAN

MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT BY MONT ALTO MOTION PICTURE ORCHESTRA

DIRECTED BY ERNST LUBITSCH, USA, 1925

CAST Ronald Colman, Irene Rich, May McAvoy, Bert Lytell, Edward Martindel, and Carrie Daumery

PRODUCTION Warner Bros. **PRINT SOURCE** Museum of Modern Art

Ernst Lubitsch never discussed what led to his audacious decision to adapt Oscar Wilde's famously talky stage play *Lady Windermere's Fan* as a silent film in 1925. Personally, I would like to think it was a gift to Irene Rich, the actress whose sublime performance as the tolerant queen to a philandering king in Lubitsch's first American film, *Rosita*, effectively stole the film from its ostensible star, Mary Pickford. Rich's queen already possesses the qualities of Wilde's heroic Mrs. Erlynne: discernment, discretion, an acceptance of human imperfection, and the wit and patience to deal with it.

Whatever its origins, Lubitsch's *Lady Windermere* stands as one of the great achievements of silent film, an alignment of form and feeling that grows more impressive with each viewing. By eliminating the play's most famous element—the endless succession of epigrams, delivered by diverse characters who all seem to have exactly the same sense of humor—Lubitsch shifts his emphasis to the thoughts behind the mask of language, as revealed through gestures, looks, postures, the way his characters navigate spaces both domestic and public.

In the brilliant opening sequence, Lubitsch establishes the complicated relationship between

Lady Windermere (May McAvoy) and her ardent admirer, the notorious flirt Lord Darlington (Ronald Colman), moving from a balanced two-shot into an isolated close-up of their handshake, as Darlington's grip registers a bit too warmly for Lady Windermere's comfort. They separate, interrupted by Lord Windermere (Bert Lytell), who has just received an enigmatic note from Mrs. Erlynne (Rich). Darlington notices that Windermere is trying to hide the note from his wife, and another close-up of hands shows Darlington helpfully pushing the envelope back into Windermere's grasp—one man of the world helping another to cover up a *billet doux*. When Windermere retreats in embarrassment, Darlington feels empowered to make a declaration to Lady W—"I love you!"—at which point Lubitsch cuts to an extreme long shot of the couple, for the first time revealing the extraordinary height of Harold Grieve's stylized sets. Lubitsch fades out on this sudden expansion of space, which looms like an unresolved chord over the scenes that follow.

This is a stunning display of technique, beyond all but a few directors of the period, yet Lubitsch is careful to follow it with a sequence of perfect simplicity: Mrs. Erlynne at her desk, holding her head for a moment then turning to look at a portrait of Lady Windermere in a society paper. From a

close shot of the photo Lubitsch moves into a slightly tighter shot of Mrs. Erlynne, as a little smile of pride plays on her lips. As she looks away, the character goes inward—signaled by a microscopic shift in Irene Rich’s regard as she looks away from the paper, eyes briefly closing. A slowly exhaled breath covers the cut to a slightly wider angle, as Mrs. Erlynne pulls herself out of the past and prepares to deal with the present. What technique there is here is purely in the service of the actor, as Lubitsch steps back and allows Rich to fill out her character,

finding pride, regret, determination, and a hint of irony in one crystalline moment.

As his prize pupil Alfred Hitchcock did decades later in *Vertigo*, Lubitsch quickly exposes the big, last act reveal that is central to the source material. Mrs. Erlynne is Lady Windermere’s mother, erased from family memory because of an affair that even Mrs. Erlynne no longer seems to remember. Again, a simple gesture completely recasts the action; only the viewer is aware of Mrs. Erlynne’s essential nobility, as she moves toward

the moment of sacrifice, ready to throw away her painfully regained reputation in order to prevent her daughter from committing a mistake exactly like her own.

Rich herself had a background almost as colorful as Mrs. Erlynne’s. Born to upper middle-class comfort in Buffalo, New York, in 1891, little Irene found her life turned upside down when the collapse of her father’s business drove the family into exile in California. By the time she was twenty-five, she had been married twice and had two children; to

support herself and her family, she moved to Hollywood to sell real estate but soon drifted into extra work, where her poise and aplomb caught the attention of Will Rogers, who cast her opposite him in eight pictures, from the lost *Water, Water Everywhere* in 1920 to *So This Is London* in 1930. Rich’s aristocratic turns in *Rosita* and *Lady Windermere* led to a long series of wronged society wives and exiled duchesses, mostly in films that are now lost (one particularly regrets the 1928 *Craig’s Wife*, directed by William C. deMille).

Rich had no difficulty adjusting to sound and soon found regular work in radio (including as the host of her own program, *Dear John*, which ran from 1933 to 1944). Film work slowly faded away, although Rich was outstanding in later supporting

roles in films such as Frank Borzage’s *Mortal Storm* (1940), James Edward Grant’s *Angel and the Badman* (1947), and, supremely, as one of John Ford’s great matriarchs, the wife of Ward Bond’s Sgt. Major in *Fort Apache* (1948).

Announced in June 1925, *Lady Windermere’s Fan* went into production in August, with Clive Brook cast as Lord Darlington. Brook was soon replaced by Ronald Colman, borrowed at great expense from Samuel Goldwyn, and principal photography began at the end of September. Filming was completed by the end of October, following a location jaunt to Toronto for several days of filming at the Woodbine Racetrack. Lubitsch himself handled the editing, and the film premiered in New York City on December 26.

Mordaunt Hall of the *New York Times* deplored Lubitsch’s revision of Wilde: “... he has nevertheless fashioned an entertaining picture which will probably be more popular in provincial communities—where Lubitsch is better known than Wilde—than a production that retained Wilde’s nimble wit.” Even Iris Barry, who later purchased the nitrate print for MoMA’s collection that became the basis for this restoration, called it “heavy and flat as a cold pancake.” But most of the critics saw a classic in the making. A typical response was William A. Johnson’s in *Motion Picture News*: “Never before, to me at least, has the screen fairly talked—and with such a brilliancy, forcefulness and finish. Lubitsch tells in a flash, and with lasting effect, what novels must explain in chapters. This, it seems to me, is the inherent power of the screen. Lubitsch has brought it forth in all its fullness.”

— DAVE KEHR



Ronald Colman, Bert Lytell, and May McAvoy

Growing the SFSFF Collection

by Robert Byrne

Since expanding its mission of exhibition and education to include restoration and preservation in 2012, the San Francisco Silent Film Festival has helped to return more than thirty silent-era titles to modern audiences. Eager to restore works of local interest as well as those from around the world, the SFSFF Collection now hosts an eclectic range of motion pictures, from *When the Earth Trembled*, a narrative feature set at the time of the 1906 San Francisco earthquake, to René Clair's benchmark comedy *The Italian Straw Hat* and Fridrikh Ermler's last silent *Fragment of an Empire* as well as several actualities and other shorts or fragments. In addition, two restored features by French director Musidora, *Pour Don Carlos* and *Soleil et Ombre*, were made available online for members over the past two years. New to the collection this year are the Benjamin T. Gault films of southwestern Ireland (part of *Amazing Tales from the Archives*) as well as six other new titles. All but *The Primrose Path* are making their world premieres.

Foolish Wives (1922)

No single complete copy of the release version of Erich von Stroheim's film survives. What does survive are a tinted-and-toned 35mm nitrate print with Italian intertitles from Cineteca Italiana of Milan and, from New York's Museum of Modern Art, a 35mm black-and-white print of an unreleased re-edited and re-titled version created in 1928 by Universal for a never-realized sound release. Available documentation was invaluable in the reconstruction of the film, and it included the script

for an eight-reel version and, from the Library of Congress, a copy of Sigmund Romberg's piano score, whose musical cues helped reconstruct the film's sequencing and title content. As neither of the surviving sources had original intertitles, new titles were based on the design and typeface as other Universal Super-Jewel releases of the time. To reproduce the tinting and toning the MoMA and SFSFF team relied on the coloring conventions of Universal films of the period. For the spectacular hand-colored effects the team used contemporary reviews and a trade press article written by the original colorist Gustav Brock.

Below the Surface (1920)

A 35mm original nitrate negative of Irvin Willat's underwater melodrama was preserved by the Library of Congress and is the second Willat-directed film in SFSFF's collection, along with 1919's *Behind the Door*. Sections with nitrate damage were made up from a 35mm safety duplicate negative that had been struck from the negative prior to its deterioration. The added color is based on a tinted 35mm nitrate print preserved at Eye Filmmuseum in the Netherlands. For digital presentation, the coloring has been digitally rendered. The restored 35mm print has been chemically dye-tinted and toned.

The Primrose Path (1925)

The reconstruction of this Harry O. Hoyt programmer combined sources from the UCLA Film and Television Archive, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, and Lobster Films, which is now the steward of the Blackhawk Collection.

One Restoration at a Time

Among the three 35mm tinted nitrate prints and one black-and-white 16mm print preserved at the UCLA Film and Television Archive were prints originally released in the United Kingdom, where the film had been edited to minimize uniquely American references. A 35mm duplicate negative from Blackhawk and 35mm nitrate print from Lobster, both held by the archive of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, were also incorporated. The color tinting reproduces the dye-tinted colors present in the original nitrate film sources. The restored 35mm print has been chemically dye-tinted.

The Street of Forgotten Men (1925)

The only surviving original material for Herbert Brenon's *The Street of Forgotten Men* is a 35mm nitrate negative preserved at the Library of Congress. This negative was duplicated for preservation in 1969 but not before the second reel had deteriorated completely. Since that time, decomposition of the negative has continued, leaving the duplicate as the only surviving source for portions of the film. For this restoration, the usable portions of the nitrate negative were combined with sections from the 1969 preservation copy. The missing second reel has been reconstructed using film stills as well as text and dialogue based on a copy of the original script, preserved by the New York Public Library.

The Kid Reporter (1923)

Sadly, a fire that gutted Century Film's studio in 1926 took Baby Peggy's films with it, but this

comedy short from the child star's prodigious output was luckily held at the British Film Institute. Embossed with the logo of a Swiss distributor, BFI's nitrate print had both French and German intertitles. The dual-language intertitles have been replaced with English translations and designed in a style consistent with other Century Film comedies of the time.

San Francisco, The Golden Gate City (1925)

Just before the pandemic hit, Elif Rongen-Kaynakçi of Eye Filmmuseum alerted SFSFF that the Amsterdam-based archive had discovered a short reel of stencil-colored footage of San Francisco. The film had Dutch intertitles but a bit of detective work revealed that the three-minute segment was part of Pathé's weekly magazine and had been released in American theaters on July 12, 1925. The collaboration to restore the film included laboratory partner Haghefilm Digitaal, which agreed to provide its services at no cost in celebration of SFSFF's 25th anniversary. Now, nearly one hundred years after its original release, this uncovered gem returns to its hometown.

SFSFF restorations culminate in production of a new 35mm preservation film negative and 35mm positive prints, which are held in the SFSFF Collection at the Library of Congress Packard Campus for Audio Visual Preservation. SFSFF restorations adhere to the ethical guidelines for film restoration as defined by the International Federation of Film Archives (FIAP).

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Professor of Media and Communication and Film Studies at Muhlenberg College in Pennsylvania, **PAUL MCEWAN** latest book, *Cinema's Original Sin: D.W. Griffith, American Racism, and the Rise of Film Culture*, is due out this year.

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FARRAN SMITH NEHME's writing has been published by *Film Comment*, *Sight and Sound*, and the Criterion Collection, among other outlets. Her novel, *Missing Reels*, was published in 2014.

MONICA NOLAN is a novelist who has written about film and culture for the *San Francisco Chronicle*, *Bitch* magazine, *Lambda Literary Review*, *Release Print*, *Noir City*, and *Frameline*.

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CATHERINE A. SUROWIEC is an independent film scholar, design historian, and editor with a background in archival work. She has edited the catalog of the Pordenone Silent Film Festival since 2000.

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JEFFREY VANCE is a film historian, archivist, and author of several film books on silent film, including *Chaplin: Genius of the Cinema* and *Douglas Fairbanks*.

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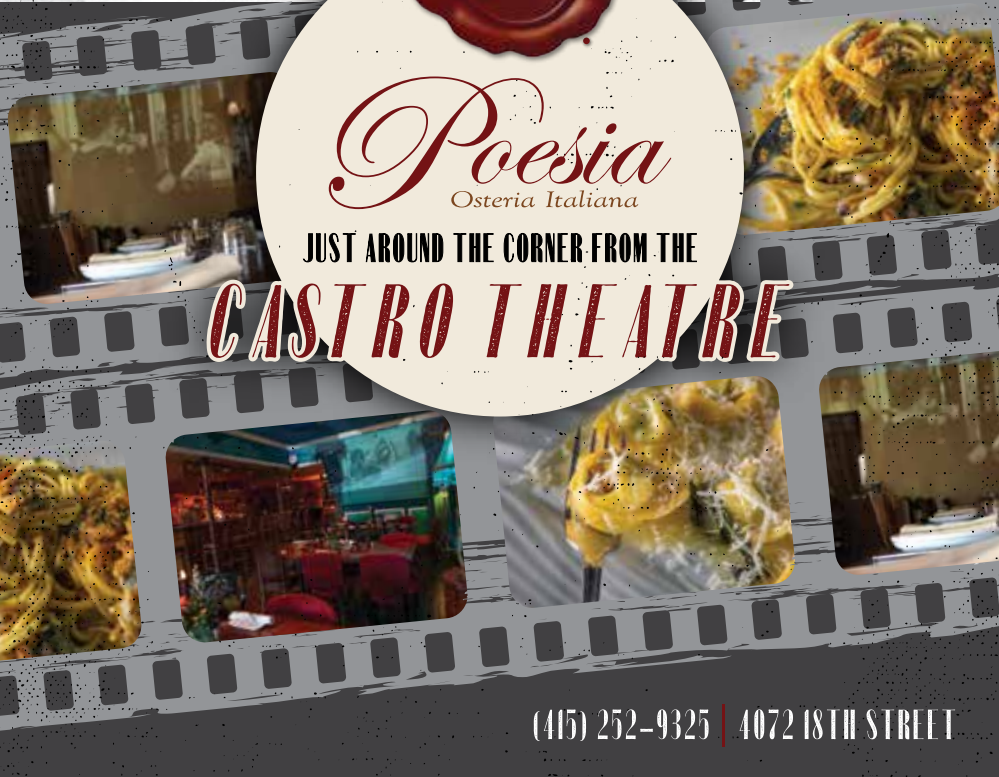
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A moment of **RARE COMMUNION** with fellow humans, eight hundred people making no noise, **RAPT IN SILENCE** together, in that glorious space. —*Bryony Dixon*

I regret only that [Abel Gance] did not live to see one of those four momentous *Napoleon* screenings in Oakland—with a huge screen, audiences of three thousand, a full orchestra playing Carl Davis's tremendous score, and the standing ovations that followed. **PURE LIVE CINEMA!** SFSFF should have received a Legion of Honor. Nevertheless, a comment from a member of the staff at San Francisco's French Consulate was compensation enough: **"I AM SPEECHLESS,"** he said. "In both languages." —*Kevin Brownlow*

...what makes this festival **SO SPECIAL** to me, notwithstanding an ever-growing landscape of silent film events. I won't be alone in **CITING THE TERRIFIC AUDIENCE**—how can you not? —*Jay Weissberg*

It only happens **IN DREAMLAND ...** or at the San Francisco **SILENT FILM** Festival. —*Serge Bromberg*

It is not an exaggeration to say that the festival is always on our minds at the Eye archive. Whenever we see something related to San Francisco, **BE IT THE GOLDEN GATE, OR MISSION STREET,** or the Presidio, it is as if alarm bells ring in our nitrate room to contact SFSFF as soon as possible in the hopes of being able to **PROVIDE A SMALL SURPRISE** to the San Francisco audiences. —*Elif Rongen-Kaynakçi*

It seems as if the Castro Theatre, in all its **EXTRAVAGANT BEAUTY,** exerts a **MAGNETIC PULL** on silent-film art, attracting not just magnificent films but its people too. —*Hisashi Okajima*

Then again, it's hard to beat Buster Keaton. **BUSTER AND FELIX THE CAT** was a great pairing. Oh, but what about **LAUREL AND HARDY ...?** It's hard to pick one. —*Pete Docter*

...Chaney, Browning, Crawford, Horne, and I danced **OUR CRUEL CAKEWALK** together for forty-eight exquisite minutes of **MAD-LOVE** cinema perfection... —*Guy Maddin*

Every time I think about it I want to **JUMP TO MY FEET** again for the much deserved standing ovation. **BRAVO.** —*Gary Meyer*

My absolute peak experience, without question, was being able to see *Napoleon* at the Paramount Theatre in Oakland. This was the **GREATEST SINGLE EXPERIENCE** I've ever had in a movie theater, so great I went on consecutive days to absorb **THE SPLENDOR OF IT ALL.** I can't thank the Silent Film Festival enough for having the courage to undertake that massive project. —*Eddie Muller*

...I found myself overcome with emotion. **HUNDREDS OF PEOPLE** had gathered on a **SUNDAY MORNING** to watch a film that had not likely been seen in the U.S. since it opened in 1916. —*Shelley Stamp*

Attending *Man with a Movie Camera* with a crowd alive to every nuance reminded me of **HOW ELECTRIC IT CAN BE** when a huge audience—not a clique or a cult or a coterie—connects with **SOMETHING WORTH APPRECIATING.** —*Michael Sragow*

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