

SAN FRANCISCO SILENT FILM FESTIVAL

A DAY OF SILENTS



DECEMBER 2, 2023 | CASTRO THEATRE

ADOS SCHEDULE

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 2, 2023

- 10 AM **OF MICE AND MEN (AND CATS AND CLOWNS)**
Music by Wayne Barker and Nicholas White
- 12 PM **THE WILD CAT**
Music by Mont Alto Motion Picture Orchestra
- 2:15 PM **THE EAGLE**
Music by Wayne Barker
- 4:15 PM **PAVEMENT BUTTERFLY**
Music by the Sascha Jacobsen Ensemble
- 7 PM **SAFETY LAST!**
Music by Mont Alto Motion Picture Orchestra
- 9 PM **FORGOTTEN FACES**
Music by the Sascha Jacobsen Ensemble

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MUSICIANS

WAYNE BARKER

Wayne Barker has garnered acclaim both for his original compositions and live performances in theater, most notably a Tony nomination for his *Peter and the Starcatcher* score. His numerous credits include composing for and performing at the piano with Dame Edna Everage as Master of the Dame's Music.

MONT ALTO MOTION PICTURE ORCHESTRA

A chamber ensemble that revives the tradition of silent-film orchestras, Mont Alto Motion Picture Orchestra culls historic libraries of music for its live musical accompaniments. Together, musicians Rodney Sauer (piano), Britt Swenson (violin), David Short (cello), Brian Collins (clarinet), and Dawn Kramer (trumpet) create beautifully vibrant scores performed with elegance and wit.

SASCHA JACOBSEN ENSEMBLE

Primarily a bassist, Sascha Jacobsen draws on a variety of musical styles from classical to jazz and Argentine Tango for his silent-film accompaniments. He has played with musicians as varied as the Kronos Quartet, Rita Moreno, and Randy Newman. For *Pavement Butterfly*, Jacobsen will be joined by Seth Asarnow (piano), Masuro Koga (saxophone), and Michele Walther (violin). For *Forgotten Faces*, Seth Asarnow (piano), Sheldon Brown (clarinet), and Aaron Kierbel (percussion).

NICHOLAS WHITE

Sound effects artist Nicholas White has amassed the world's largest collection of antique traps (whistles, blocks, bells, ratchets, anvils, etc., used for sound effects). He will join Wayne Barker for the *Of Mice and Men* matinée and Mont Alto Motion Picture Orchestra for *Safety Last!*



OF MICE AND MEN (AND CATS AND CLOWNS)

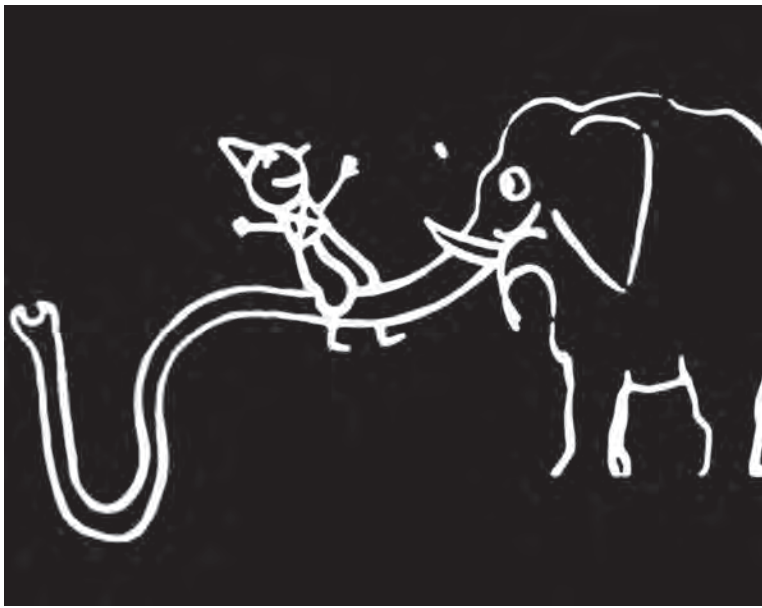
MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT BY WAYNE BARKER AND NICHOLAS WHITE

FANTASMAGORIE (1908) Directed by Émile Cohl, **HOW A MOSQUITO OPERATES** (1912) Directed by Winsor McKay, **ADAM RAISES CAIN** (1922) Directed by Tony Sarg, **AMATEUR NIGHT ON THE ARK** (1923) Directed by Paul Terry, **BED TIME** (1923) Directed by Dave and Max Fleischer, **FELIX GRABS HIS GRUB** (1924) Directed by Pat Sullivan, **A TRIP TO MARS** (1924) Directed by Dave and Max Fleischer, **VACATION** (1924) Directed by Dave and Max Fleischer, **ALICE'S BALLOON RACE** (1926) Directed by Walt Disney, **FELIX THE CAT IN SURE-LOCKED HOMES** (1928) Directed by Pat Sullivan
PRINT SOURCE FPA Classics

Is there a more reliable show-stopper than wedding animated cartoons to live-action footage? Whether it's Jerry the Mouse swapping his usual feline foil for Gene Kelly in *Anchors Aweigh* (1945), Dick Van Dyke teaching a quartet of penguins how to shimmy in *Mary Poppins* (1964), or Bob Hoskins surviving a dark night of the soul in *Toontown in Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* (1988), these moments leave even the most seasoned viewers gaping like kids at a magician's tent. We see the trick unfurl before our eyes, but we marvel at the timing, the coordination, the consummate skill and confidence that sends a flesh-and-blood man dancing beside an ink-and-paint mouse.

The great revelation of the animated films of the silent era is two-fold: that cartoons and live-action were blended together from the very beginning of the medium and that this free mingling of skin and ink was the norm, not the exception. Over and over again, the cartoon cannot be separated from the cartoonist. Indeed, the cartoonist himself is often the star!

A direct line can be drawn between the early animated cartoons on the motion picture screen and the cartoons, caricatures, and illustrations that flooded newspapers and magazines at the turn of the 20th century. Not only did many pioneer animators get their start in print, their motion picture cartoons explicitly connected the new medium to its predecessors. Winsor McCay was already famous as a stage performer and creator of the *Little Nemo in Slumberland* newspaper comic strip when he made *Gertie the Dinosaur* (1914)—a hybrid film wherein McCay appears as himself in a long prologue, visiting the American Museum of Natural History and accepting a bet from another cartoonist that he “can make the *Dinosaur* live again by a series of hand-drawn cartoons.” The main attraction—the animated portion where McCay makes good on the bet—is a quicksilver boast, a feat of derring-do, cartooning as performance. There's a similar show-off air in McCay's *The Sinking of the Lusitania* (1918), with the animator challenging himself to an astonishing degree of fidelity to detail in an act of cartoon re-



portage. An introductory sequence was also originally part of McCay's *How a Mosquito Operates* (1912), but in the version that comes down to us now, the six thousand individual drawings must stand on their own—which they do, in increasingly creative and excruciating detail, a new frontier in sicko realism.

Not all early cartoons were so literal. A more free-flowing, surrealist sensibility pervades Émile Cohl's *Fantasmagorie* (1908). It begins with a live-action hand sketching a few white lines on a black backdrop. The drawings themselves are simple and child-like, but the myriad ways that one drawing drifts, transforms, or deranges itself into the next remains dizzying and destabilizing. It's particularly astonishing to consider Cohl's cartoon in the context of its contemporaries. To look at live-action film history landmarks from the same decade such as *The Life of an American Fireman* (1903), *Rescued by Rover* (1905), or *The Lonely Villa* (1909) is to glimpse filmmakers cautiously, painstakingly groping their way toward a working grammar of space and time, taking the audience by the hand and guiding them between each new

scene. Continuity is a pattern that can be recognized and deciphered: first we're here, then we go over there, and then we go back where we started. *Fantasmagorie* has no patience for that exercise and uses its blank screen as a conjurer's canvas; you blink and a flower has turned into an elephant, but before you puzzle that out, the elephant has been replaced by a building. At one point, Cohl paints himself into a corner, and the cartoonist's hand comes back

to rearrange the pieces again. As with McCay, Cohl never asks us to suspend our disbelief, we're always aware that the thing we're watching is the product of a pen.

The cartoonist is never more central than in the superlative *Out of the Inkwell* series from the brothers Max and Dave Fleischer. Each short begins with Max summoning Koko the Clown from his inkwell and committing him to paper, granting the cartoon some conditional freedom until it's time to stuff him back in the bottle. Often, as in *Bed Time* (1923) and *A Trip to Mars* (1924), Koko rebels and turns Max's pen right back at him, treating the real world as pliable and plastic as the cartoon realm. The endless invention of the *Inkwell* shorts could be an essay unto itself, so let us only observe here how Koko may be the main attraction but only because Max plays straight man and second fiddle, a self-deprecating schlemiel often bested by his own creation. Max isn't a world-beater and gentleman draftsman like McCay, but just a schlub trying to get through the workday without an ink stain in the eye.

There's a more harmonious relationship between the human and the cartoon in Walt Disney's *Alice Comedies*. The shorts series began in 1923 with *Alice's Wonderland*, but the concept bore only a faint connection to Lewis Carroll—just a girl tossed into a wacky land without explanation or preamble. In animation genealogy, the *Alice Comedies* are first cousins to funny animal cartoons like Paul Terry's *Aesop's Fables* or the barnyard hijinks that Disney perfected in the 1930s. Often the live-action *Alice* is simply another character in an elaborate cartoon world with so much action bouncing around its frames that she sometimes seems like a supporting player in her own series—the supreme technical feat made to look effortless and mundane.

It's not unreasonable to conclude on the basis of a short like *Alice's Balloon Race* (1926) that the star of the series is not *Alice*, but Julius, a wily black cat who bears a striking—and not remotely coincidental—resemblance to Felix the Cat, the most famous cartoon character of the silent era. (Disney won a contract for the *Alice Comedies* after independent cartoon specialist Margaret Winkler lost the distribution rights to Felix and *Out of the Inkwell*; Winkler took a real chance on the unknown Kansas City animator, but clearly pushed Disney to give her another Felix.)

Felix began as a creature of film and quickly spawned a comic strip and an array of licensed merchandise. The Felix cartoons carried the name of putative creator Pat Sullivan, but the character was bigger than any interloping mortal; his cartoons didn't begin with Sullivan (or Otto Messmer, who actually did most of the animation) sitting at a desk, puzzling out that week's installment. *Nevertheless* the Felix cartoons often relied

on cartoon logic every bit as clever and playful as Fleischer's or Cohl's. In *Felix Grabs His Grub* (1924), Felix wonders how he'll find something to eat—and then proceeds to climb atop the question mark that forms above his head to reach higher ground. In *Sure-Locked Homes* (1928), nighttime arrives as a series of ink blots falling from the top of the frame, as if dripping carelessly from an invisible cartoonist's pen.

The profundity of Felix often sneaks up on you. Late in *Sure-Locked Homes*, Felix discovers that the mysterious figures that have been stalking him are only shadow puppets (much less delicately rendered but no less evocative than Tony Sarg's marionettes, also part of the program). In that moment, we chuckle at one breed of animation scared near-to-death by another. On the page, it sounds self-reflexive and pretentious, but on screen it just works. That's the trick of silent animation—big ideas rendered in invisible ink.

— KYLE WESTPHAL





THE WILDCAT

MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT BY MONT ALTO MOTION PICTURE ORCHESTRA

DIRECTED BY ERNST LUBITSCH, GERMANY, 1921

CAST Pola Negri, Paul Heidemann, Victor Janson, Edith Meller, Hermann Thimig, Paul Biensfeldt, Paul Graetz, Max Kronert, and Erwin Kopp **ORIGINAL LANGUAGE TITLE** *Die Bergkatze* **PRODUCTION** Projektions-AG Union **PRINT SOURCE** Murnau-Stiftung

A few years ago Bob Dylan released an album entitled *Rough and Rowdy Ways*, a title that reminded me of Ernst Lubitsch. (Apologies—it’s the way my mind works.) To be specific, it reminded me of Ernst Lubitsch’s German comedies. Case in point: *Die Bergkatze* (*The Wildcat*).

The Wildcat is basically a return to the playful, phantasmagorical world of *The Doll* after Lubitsch’s first flings with the epic and with Pola Negri: *Carmen* and *Madame Dubarry*. In broad outline, *The Wildcat* is a comic opera with Lubitsch’s rambunctious wit substituting for music. Pola Negri plays the daughter of the leader of mountain brigands. She falls in love with the captain of the regiment who has been charged with finding and arresting her father. The only thing missing is the music, a lack which will be remedied at the festival.

In physical style, it’s unlike anything else in Lubitsch’s career, a baroque confection closer to Josef von Sternberg’s *The Scarlet Empress* than to a conventional German silent film. The décor by Ernst Stern and Max Gronau is something out of a German fairy tale. The set of Fort Tossenstein was built on location in the Bavarian Alps, around Garmisch-Partenkirchen, and both exteriors and interiors look as if they’re made out of cake icing. Many shots are framed by all manner of mattes

to alter the image size: slashing diagonals, ovals, scalloped edges. At one point Lubitsch even masks the screen to the modern 1:85 dimension.

The overall effect is energetic as well as infectious. In a word, playful. At one point, the brigands storm the fort, but they hear an orchestra playing and are so overcome by the melody that they just have to stop and dance before the pillaging can begin. The plot culminates in the title character marrying one of the brigands, whereupon they are handcuffed together. (Lubitsch’s ambivalence about marriage was in place long before his own pair of flamboyantly failed attempts.)

It’s an exercise in riotous artifice, as much pure fun as anything in Lubitsch’s canon. Yet, the film failed financially in Germany and was never distributed in America. Which didn’t deter Lubitsch; as he wrote shortly before his death in 1947: “[T]his picture had more inventiveness and satirical pictorial wit than many of my other pictures ... [but] I found the German audiences in no mood to accept a picture which satirized militarism and war.”

Because of the vagaries of film distribution, American critics and audiences were unaware of Lubitsch’s early efforts such as his Meyer comedies or *The Wildcat*, and judged him by his far more sober—and derivative—historical spectacles, thus giving them a distorted idea of his talents and

making his later sexual roundelays seem like more of a radical shift than the evolutionary refinement they actually were.

The star of the picture is the legendary Pola Negri, born in 1897 as Barbara Apolonia Chatupec in a small town in Poland. Her father was a tinsmith, and she was the sole surviving child of three.

By 1911, Pola was dancing for the Imperial Ballet in Warsaw, but she contracted tuberculosis and was sent to a sanitarium in the Tatra mountains of Poland. She was there for three months and spent a good deal of time in the library, where she became enthralled with the work of the Italian poet Ada Negri. She promptly adopted the poet's last name as her own.

Tuberculosis had weakened Negri's lungs, so she had to switch to a less strenuous branch of show business. She began making films around 1914 and from the beginning projected the willful, fiery temperament that was an authentic component of her personality.

Her big break arrived when she played the part of a dancing girl in a Berlin revival of Max Reinhardt's stage production of *Sumurun*, based on a story from *The Arabian Nights*. Also featured in the production were Emil Jannings and Lubitsch. Negri disliked Jannings, whom she found pompous and without humor, but she and Lubitsch became close friends.

...AS MUCH PURE FUN AS ANYTHING IN LUBITSCH'S CANON.

In 1918, she began to appear in bigger releases such as *The Devil's Pawn* and *Mania: The Story of a Cigarette Factory Worker*. Both films survive and prove that Negri was already Negri: fierce, passionate, energetic, an actress who seized the screen with ease—a born movie star.

As for Lubitsch, he was already directing and appearing in raucous comedies as Meyer, an aggressive, invariably fumbling schlemiel. Lubitsch directing Negri was bound to happen, and the result was a group of costume epics that were hits in both Germany and America, which resulted in both star and director making the trek west.

They reunited at Paramount in 1924 to make the delicious *Forbidden Paradise*, in which Negri downshifted to the drily amused woman-in-control mode that became a feature of later classic Lubitsch comedies such as *To Be or Not to Be*.

Negri remained a star at Paramount until sound landed and revealed her Polish accent, which audiences found unattractive. The rest of her career was a catch-as-catch-can trek spent mostly in Europe until after World War II, when she landed in San Antonio, where she spent the rest of her life.

In silence, Pola Negri came across. She still does. As Jeanine Basinger writes in *Silent Stars*, Negri stands out because of her "strong sexuality, her fearless portrayals of passion, and her animal magnetism." Basinger points out that, "In the

silent era, glamour girls were usually one thing or another—good or bad. Stars were divided into those who scampered and those who simpered, the virgin or the whore Negri ... is everything. She is scintillating and extremely attractive, with the implication that men are drawn to her not for her decadence or erotic posturing but for her impulsive, hearty sexuality, which they long to experience. She's unafraid of sex, and makes it clear she wants it, too."

Lubitsch was a hugely creative director in Germany but only became a legend after emigrating to America in 1922 and making movies distinguished by a hushed erotic charge: *Lady Windermere's Fan* and *Trouble in Paradise*, among others. Still later there was the surpassing humanity of *The Shop Around the Corner* and *Heaven Can Wait*, where the smiles and murmurs are replaced by a full recognition of the risk and pain that accompany emotional commitment.

In every period of Lubitsch's career, there are films that are miracles. A century later, it's clear that the underlying miracle was Lubitsch himself.

— SCOTT EYMAN





THE EAGLE

MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT BY WAYNE BARKER

DIRECTED BY CLARENCE BROWN, USA, 1925

CAST Rudolph Valentino, Vilma Bánky, Louise Dresser, Albert Conti, James Marcus, and Carrie Clarke
Ward PRODUCTION United Artists **PRINT SOURCE** Photoplay Productions

■ *Silent Stars*, Jeanine Basinger notes that for modern audiences Rudolph Valentino has “become an image frozen in time, a still photograph emblematic of the world of the 1920s, that crazy outmoded world of sheiks and flappers.” This static—even fossilized—image robs us of the very elements that defined his extraordinary stardom: “his energy, his sass, his slightly mocking self-humor” and “his sensuous physicality, his graceful movements and precise gestures.” The sumptuous and witty *The Eagle* gives us ample opportunity to appreciate just how appealing a screen presence Valentino was and how deftly his director, Clarence Brown, nurtured his talents.

The film was a comeback of sorts for the star after a “meteoric” rise kicked off by show-stopping performances in two 1921 releases, Rex Ingram’s *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* and George Melford’s trashy-but-fun *The Sheik* (in truth, Valentino had appeared in films since the mid-1910s). Valentino’s stardom was astonishing in the levels of devotion it inspired, most notably from female fans, many of whom were beginning to push the narrow limits of gender roles and sexual desire. The Hollywood studio system, increasingly invested in the industry of fame, was eager to play to that fan base, shaping vehicles that showcased Valentino’s face and lithe body. Yet with this adoration came alarming levels of abhorrence from sections of the press and from some cinemagoers. As Gaylyn Studlar explores in her

1996 study, *This Mad Masquerade: Stardom and Masculinity in the Jazz Age*, the backlash against Valentino was infused with virulent xenophobia and homophobia. Representative of the nastiness to which he was subjected is Dick Dorgan’s ditty, “Song of Hate,” published in *Photoplay* in July 1922, in which readers are assured that all men hate this “embezzler of hearts” with his “oriental optics,” and accompanied by a grotesque and racist pencil sketch of Valentino.

Such vitriol, alongside contract disputes and a complicated private life, deeply affected Valentino and led to a hiatus in his screen appearances until 1924. By 1925, however, he was anxious for more compelling roles and accepted a promising offer from United Artists. In May, it was announced that the story chosen would showcase a new Valentino, no longer the stereotypical Arab of *The Sheik* or the tortured bullfighter of 1922’s *Blood and Sand*, but a “Slavic Lover” and all-round action hero. The director was the newly signed Clarence Brown, working from a script by longtime Lubitsch collaborator Hanns Kräly, supported by cinematographers George Barnes and Dev Jennings and a cast that included several European-born actors.

By the time he teamed up with Valentino, director Brown had achieved a double degree in engineering, run a successful automobile business, and accumulated ten years of film experience, first as an apprentice to Maurice Tourneur (his “god,”

according to his interview with Kevin Brownlow in *The Parade's Gone By*), then as a director for hire and, from 1923, as one of Universal's contract directors. At Universal, Brown had excelled directing female stars such as Virginia Valli (*The Signal Tower*), Ruth Clifford (*Butterfly*), Laura La Plante (*Butterfly; Smouldering Fires*), Pauline Frederick (*Smouldering Fires*), and Louise Dresser (*The Goose Woman*), but in 1925 he was anxious to prove he could handle men, too. In a piece published in the *Los Angeles Times* shortly before *The Eagle*, Brown expressed his belief that there was urgent need for the star to take on a "virile story ... something that will attract the men to him and overcome their prejudice against him." Such a story needed a decisive director and Brown was just the man: Valentino later gushed that he was like the "leader of an orchestra ... [he] knows what he wants and goes right after it." The virile story chosen—an adaptation of an unfinished Pushkin novel—had ambitions to rival the output of the King of United Artists, Douglas Fairbanks, whose influence stretched to set designer William Cameron Menzies, recently of *The Thief of Bagdad*, who crossed Russian Imperial with the Oriental fantasy style then so in vogue. There was more than a hint of the older star as well in the lightness of touch, the sense of fun, that Valentino brought to his Doubrovski.

As part of his contract, Valentino had a say in casting and, fortuitously, he okayed the perfect choice to play Mascha, his love interest. The "Hungarian Rhapsody," the luminous Vilma Bánky, delights in every scene she's in—from her introduction in a reveal shot for which she lowers her fan to uncover her beautiful face lit up by a pair of mischievous (and desiring) eyes, to her final enveloping of Doubrovski in her parasol, shielding him from other gazes. It would be difficult to dispute that

Bánky was by far the best leading lady Valentino ever had, but she had competition in the form of forty-seven-year-old supporting player Louise Dresser. A vaudeville veteran, Dresser had starred in Brown's *The Goose Woman* and critics had marveled at her affecting performance as the disheveled former opera singer. In *The Eagle* Dresser again showed her willingness to transform herself and she plays up the comedy potential as the tyrant Catherine the Great. Valentino may have shot to fame when he tangoed with Alice Terry in *Four Horsemen*, but here his Doubrovski dances to the tune of the tsarina, subject to her official orders and her lecherous attentions—a scene in Catherine's private quarters, in which she tries to ply him with alcohol to make him more receptive to her advances, is a masterclass in acting by both players.

The Eagle was intended to rejuvenate Valentino's career, but it also served as a calling card for Brown. He handled his actors with the same assurance that marked his work at Universal, while his attention to visual details (of landscapes, of bodies, of machinery), his dynamic editing, and his polished—sometimes showy—camerawork found brilliant expression in this romp through an imagined Russia. Many scenes continue to delight: the exhilarating opening in which the tsarina's inspection of her favorite regiment is intercut with shots of Doubrovski giving chase to a runaway carriage and, in an impressive stunt shot, bringing it to a halt; the careful choreography of the seduction "dance" between Catherine and Doubrovski; the comic scene in which a haughty Mascha attempts to evade a flirtatious Doubrovski (here, Brown reworks a scene from *The Goose Woman*); and the dizzying array of witty shots that deliberately mislead the audience (Doubrovski's administering of a massage to his mortal enemy,

Kyrilla), introduce risqué innuendos (Doubrovski on his knees in front of the tsarina, followed by a reaction shot of her in ecstasy), or slyly invite audiences to make visual connections (Mascha's corpulent aunt, played by the wonderful Carrie Clarke Ward, captured in a shot that also features her doppelganger, a squashed-face lapdog!).

In the midst of these visual delights there is one that might make even today's viewer wonder, "just how did they do that?" For the standout sequence in which Kyrilla and company are gorging themselves at a banquet, Brown's camera traverses the entire table, not as a frontal horizontal shot (as his mentor Maurice Tourneur had done in *The Wishing Ring* in 1914), but as a tracking shot up the middle. Interviewed by Brownlow, Brown explained how it was done: "The camera started with a character (James Marcus) ... then it traveled along the middle of the table ... which must have been sixty feet long. To get the camera in that position was very difficult; no equipment existed to do it. So we made perambulators. We put one on each side of the table and we constructed a bridge, with stressbeams so that it was rigid. Then we dropped a crosspiece and fastened the camera from the top, so that the bottom of the camera could travel from the top. Of course, nothing could obstruct the movement of the camera, so we had prop boys putting candelabra in place just before the camera picked them up." (An aside: engineer Brown was so pleased with himself that he self-plagiarized the shot for 1935's *Anna Karenina* and, almost twenty years later, Delmer Daves paid homage to the shot in *Never Let Me Go*, produced by Brown).

The Eagle was released in November 1925 and earned a modest return and generally appreciative reviews, but it didn't quite prove the elixir that Valentino had so wanted. The star remained

the target of astonishing levels of abuse and just weeks before his early death in August 1926, the *Chicago Tribune* published a now notorious piece that asked, "Why didn't someone quietly drown Rudolph Guglielmo, alias Valentino, years ago?"

Brown went on to forge a rich career, showcasing stars (notably, Garbo and Crawford) and making moving and personal films (*The Yearling*, *Intruder in the Dust*, among others), but he always regretted that he never had the chance to work a second time with Valentino. Forty years on, he fondly recalled him as one of "the greatest personalities of the screen."

— GWENDA YOUNG



VALENTINO'S LAST WORDS

A bodice-breaching lover from a torrid romance novel come to life, Valentino tangoed his way to matinee idol status in that Buenos Aires dive in 1921's *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*. When influential critic Robert E. Sherwood selected his 1922 bullfighter film *Blood and Sand* as one of sixteen favorites of that year, he captured the enormous impact Valentino had had in such a short time, as well as hinted at the actor's reluctance about the whole thing: "This swarthy Italian dancer has been the most extensively worshipped of all the matinee idols in the history of the theatre; his photograph has been pasted on at least one mirror in almost every home throughout this country; he has been the embarrassed recipient of a flood of fan letters that reached an average of some 4,500 a week ... a symbol of masculine attraction to everyone—from sixteen to sixty."

Fellow idols of similar rank like Sessue Hayakawa, Wallace Reid, and Jack Gilbert bristled, too, against their typecasting—hardly an uncommon affliction in Hollywood—and all three attempted with limited success to escape its narrow confines. Hayakawa, whose resistance, like Valentino's, included the second front of bigotry, broke with the studios entirely and made films independently (until he had to leave altogether). What Reid and Gilbert really wanted to do was direct. They might have settled for playing more complex characters, even in smaller films, yet both ended up basically sacrificed to fame.

Valentino tried, pulling a Garbo (before Garbo) and went on strike over career control (and money). Among his subsequent roles, his portrayal of the action hero/one-woman man in *The Eagle* still stands out as an exception; he once called it the first of his films that "has really been of my own choosing." After Valentino unexpectedly died less than a year later, some lamented an industry that had wasted his talent. "The madness to cast Valentino in romantic pictures pursued," Jim Tully wrote in *Vanity Fair*. "But through all this maze of bad taste Valentino groped. None of it helped him as he wished to be helped." While acknowledging he was a beneficiary as well as a victim, Valentino often shared his own laments, leaving us with glimmers of what might have been. — Shari Kizirian

A BORGIA

Tully's obituary was particularly mournful for the career and for the artist. The vagabond-turned-chronicler-of-movieland sprinkled his obituary with snippets of his past conversations with the actor, including this revealing exchange: "I once asked Valentino which character he would like best to play on the screen. 'Cesare Borgia,' he answered. Surprised, I watched him closely as he continued. 'It would not be popular, but I want to play it for my very own. Borgia was not the man they say he was. His story was written by his enemies.' Forgetful of an interviewer who might deal with him unkindly, he quoted Machiavelli, Villari, Gregorovius and Sabatini to prove his points. Thinking of American women I ventured: 'But Cesare had a mustache.' 'I'd play him with one.'"

A FARMER

Business manager S. George Ullman's memoir released two months after the actor's death quotes Valentino as wanting to play not only Borgia but Christopher Columbus and "before I finish, I want most of all to play a Gypsy and an Apache." Opportunistic calculations aside, Ullman expressed a great deal of warmth for the actor in his book and recalled a conversation they'd had about Valentino's path to stardom while he happened to be in costume for *The Son of the Sheik*: "I wonder what would have become of me if I had stayed in Castellaneta, bought a piece of land and become a scientific farmer? Can you picture the scene?"

A COWBOY

Helen Louise Walker interviewed Valentino ten days before he succumbed to peritonitis but only prepared the conversation for publication much later, for a 1933 issue of *Motion Picture* magazine on the seventh anniversary of his death. "I have thought of doing a Western—a cowboy role—against the colorful romantic background of the Southwest." Sensing Walker's skepticism, Valentino continued: "I don't mean the regulation sort of thing, of course. I mean a real story—with the feeling of the sweep and color of that early history. There were Latin types who figured in that pageant—Spaniards, even Italians! They weren't all 'Virginians,' you know ... I shall be surprised if we succeed."

NO SHEIKS

"I'm Tired of Being a Sheik," Valentino's interview for *Collier's*, took place in late 1925 and was published in January 1926 before *The Son of a Sheik* was agreed upon as his follow-up to *The Eagle*. "Heaven knows I'm no sheik! Look at this 'sleek black hair.' Getting a bit thin about the temples, isn't it? ... I had to pose as a sheik for five years! ... A lot of the perfumed ballyhooing was my own fault. I wanted to make a lot of money and so I let them play me up as a lounge lizard, a soft, handsome devil whose only aim in life was to sit around and be admired by women. And all that time I was a farmer at heart and still am ... I was happier when I slept on a bench in Central Park than during all the years of that 'perfect lover' stuff ... No more posing Apollo stuff for me. If any producer comes to me with a sheik part I am going to murder him! I am going to show I am a real actor if I have to play Hamlet in a waiter's tuxedo."





PAVEMENT BUTTERFLY

MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT BY THE SASCHA JACOBSEN ENSEMBLE

DIRECTED BY RICHARD EICHBERG, GERMANY/UK, 1929

CAST Anna May Wong, Alexander Granach, Fred Louis Lerch, Tilla Garden, Gaston Jacquet, Szöke Szakáll, and Nien Sön Ling **ORIGINAL LANGUAGE TITLE** *Großstadtschmetterling: Ballade einer Liebe*

PRODUCTION Eichberg-Film **PRINT SOURCE** Deutsches Filminstitut and Filmmuseum

Born into the steam and starch of her father's Chinese laundry in Los Angeles, Anna May Wong gained a toehold in Hollywood after her debut as an uncredited extra in the 1919 silent film, *The Red Lantern*, starring Alla Nazimova. Wong's striking beauty and talent immediately drew the attention of the First Lady of the Silent Screen. Nazimova's tutelage opened doors for Wong, as it did for many young hopeful actresses such as Mildred Davis, Virginia Fox, and Nancy Davis (later known as Nancy Reagan). At the tender age of fourteen, the daughter of a Chinese laundryman was ready to emerge from her cocoon.

Hobnobbing with Tinseltown elites at the Garden of Alla and elsewhere, at the same time picking up bit parts in "China flicks," Wong landed a lead role in *The Toll of the Sea* (1922), a cinematic reincarnation, one of the many to come in the long 20th century, of Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*. This second Technicolor release was a blockbuster, grossing more than \$250,000. The success led to her appearance in *The Thief of Bagdad* (1924), an Orientalist fantasy that cemented Douglas Fairbanks's status as a matinee idol and also immeasurably boosted Wong's reputation.

Despite her spectacular rise, Wong was living at a time when Chinese would be deemed "too Chinese" to play such a role—a cultural absurdity

plugging both Hollywood and Main Street USA, a racial attitude that imposed a virtual form of foot-binding on Wong's career. Consequently, when the German director Richard Eichberg offered her a five-picture contract, Wong readily joined the exodus of other nonwhite performers such as Josephine Baker and Paul Robeson and sailed for Europe to seek a better future. Or, ironically, Wong was going to Europe to be recognized as American.

Arriving in Germany in the spring of 1928, Wong saw a mesmerizing cultural scene: The artistic avant-garde—from Bertolt Brecht's *Threepenny Opera* to Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*, from Bauhaus to Dadaism—was in full swing. In mass culture, Berlin was, in the words of Kyiv-born writer Ilya Ehrenburg, "an apostle of Americanism," America being the catchword for whatever was cool and modern—everything from jazz to the foxtrot and the Charleston, to Josephine Baker's *La Revue Nègre* and her banana skirt. Arising out of the ashes of World War I, the Weimar Republic, to paraphrase Peter Gay, was dancing on the edge of a volcano. Prior to the rise of the Nazis, which shattered the liberal dreams and artistic visions, Wong was not only a witness to the precarious exuberance that characterized the short-lived Weimar era. More important, starring in a series of films to critical acclaim and rubbing elbows with



the likes of Marlene Dietrich and Walter Benjamin, Wong became the talk of the town in Berlin and achieved global stardom.

Pavement Butterfly (a.k.a. *Großstadtschmetterling*) was Wong's second German film with Eichberg. Shot primarily in France and set alternatively in Paris and Nice, the film featured Wong as Mah, a Chinese variety dancer. Performing under the stage name of Princess Butterfly, she does fan dances at a street fair to accompany a Chinese circus artist, who pulls a stunt of "the Flying Harikari"—jumping through a wooden frame lined with sharp knives. Earlier in her first German film *Song*, Wong's character dies in a precarious sword dance. Now in *Pavement Butterfly*, her new incarnation was once again ensnared in a plot of death by blade. Coco, a spurned and vindictive suitor of Mah, murders her partner and blames it on her. Running through the Parisian streets, Mah takes refuge in the studio of a young artist named Kusmin. She models for him and in the process falls in love with him. Kusmin's portrait of Mah is sold to a rich patron, but on her way to the bank, she encounters Coco, who robs her of the money. Mistakenly accusing her of theft, Kusmin throws her

out. Back on the street again, Mah is rescued this time by the patron who has bought her portrait. He takes her down to Monte Carlo, where she manages to retrieve the money stolen by Coco—only to see that Kusmin has a new love interest. Walking through the layered shadows of a portico fronting a casino, she exits from the life of the man she loves.

Befitting the film's working title *Die Fremde* (*The Foreigner*), *Pavement Butterfly* portrays the

story of a "racial other" living on the margins of a Western society. A beautiful and highly desirable woman, she is nonetheless an outsider who does not fit. Easily misunderstood, she is lovable but untouchable, a fate suffered by many of Wong's characters. Faraway from Hollywood, the taboo on interracial kissing or romance continued to dog her, as it did throughout her career. German reviewers were quick to criticize the film's racism and sexism. Writing for *Film-Kurier*, Ernst Jaeger noted the poor treatment of the "Chinese girl in saccharine": "The Eichberg team did not dare to let a happy white man share the same bed as the undressed body of a Mongolian woman." He ascribed the film's "erotic hypocrisy" to the British influence (the film was coproduced by British International Pictures), calling it "the Anglo-American icing on the cinematic cake." Another reviewer for a Socialist newspaper was more direct in its critique, putting the blame also on foreign influences: "Following the American scheme, the Chinese woman has to rescue a young white man, a painter, and at the end—because the white race is so sky-high superior to the yellow one—she gets the usual boot."

Not all was lost, however. As suggested by the title phrase, *Pavement Butterfly* introduced a new character type, a role that belonged uniquely to Wong, as she once told Walter Benjamin at a Berlin soiree. While the word *butterfly* implies the familiar Madame Butterfly, and the sorrowful ending confirms the film's place in the Orientalist mode, *pavement* points not only to a new setting for this old character type but also to the embrace of a figure in Weimar Germany as well as European cinema at the time: the vamp.

With the improvement of women's social status in Weimar Germany, the mythology of the New Woman was being promoted by the media and took on a life of its own. A typical image of such a woman is a glamorous girl fiercely independent, armed with bobbed hair, fashionable clothes, and an obligatory cigarette, working by day and frittering away the night at a dance club or a cinema. The 1930 film *The Blue Angel*, directed by Josef von Sternberg and starring Marlene Dietrich, did much to further popularize the image of the vamp. Playing a seductress named Lola, Dietrich trotted out her legs on stage and crooned in her husky voice, "love is just a game/to me men are drawn/like moths to the flame."

Wong's character in *Pavement Butterfly* was no temptress like Dietrich's Lola, but Mah is equally attractive to the men around her, with some even willing, in a noir way, to kill for her. Like Lola, Mah orbits among the demimonde of artists and gamblers, bedecked in the latest Parisian fashions, loving passionately, and yet having the courage to walk away when she realizes the futility of the affection. Her parting words, in particular, reveal her streak of independence as a New Woman: "Ich gehöre nicht zu euch" (I don't belong to you). Anticipating her signature "Dragon Lady" role in the talkie era, Wong added a dimension of the "exotic other" to the image of the vamp. In other words, she was simultaneously Madame Butterfly and the vamp.

— YUNTE HUANG





SAFETY LAST!

MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT BY MONT ALTO MOTION PICTURE ORCHESTRA

DIRECTED BY SAM TAYLOR AND FRED NEWMAYER, USA, 1923

CAST Harold Lloyd, Bill Strother, Mildred Davis, Noah Young, and Westcott B. Clarke **PRODUCTION** Hal E. Roach Studios **PRINT SOURCE** Harold Lloyd Entertainment Inc.

Harold Lloyd will forever be associated with *Safety Last!* because of a single image. Even people who have never seen a Lloyd film are familiar with the iconography of a bespectacled man hanging off the hands of a collapsing clock on the side of a skyscraper high above teeming city streets. It is one of the most celebrated images in cinema.

Safety Last! was Harold Lloyd's fourth and most complex "thrill" comedy. He came upon the idea for the film after witnessing a so-called "human fly" climb up the side of a tall building—a typical spectacle in the stunt-crazed America of the 1920s. Nearly forty years later Lloyd recalled the genesis of the film:

Without too much ado he started at the bottom of the building and started to climb up the side of this building. Well, it had such a terrific impact on me that when he got to about the third floor or fourth floor I couldn't watch him anymore. My heart was in my throat and so I started walking up the street ... but, of course, I kept looking back all the time to see if he was still there. Finally, I went around the corner. Silly as it is, I stood around the corner so I wouldn't watch him all the time, but every once in a while I'd stick my head around the corner and see how he was progressing. I just couldn't believe he could make that whole climb, but he did ... So I went back, went into the building,

got up on the roof and met the young man, gave him my address, and told him to come out and visit Hal Roach and myself. His name was Bill Strother. //

Hal Roach (Harold Lloyd's producer) placed Bill Strother under contract and devised a rough idea of a story involving a daredevil climb. The film was constructed around this comedy sequence and introductory material was later built around it.

The plot of the film has Lloyd as a country boy who sets out from his hometown of Great Bend to make good in the big city. His sweetheart (Mildred Davis, Lloyd's real-life wife) promises to marry him once he is a success. Lloyd is only able to get a position as a lowly dry goods clerk in a department store, although he writes his girl at home telling her he is one of the store executives and that it will only be a matter of time before he will send for her. His chance to succeed arrives when he overhears the general manager pledge to pay \$1,000 to anyone who can draw a large crowd to the store. Lloyd successfully proposes that the general manager hire his roommate (Bill Strother), who works as a steeplejack, to be a human fly and climb the side of the department store building. On the day of the publicity stunt, Strother is forced to dodge a disgruntled police officer (Noah Young) who has been after him, and Lloyd has to make the climb himself.



The excellence of *Safety Last!* is not confined to Lloyd scaling the skyscraper; the five reels that lead up to the climb provide the necessary context for it. Lloyd's impersonation of the store manager sets up one of the film's dominant themes, illusion, which is conveyed not only through Lloyd's role, but also through the camera's role in making the audience believe the impossible. The idea is set up in the film's first shot: Lloyd depicted behind bars, until the camera backs up to reveal the truth.

Lloyd's scaling of the building is a classic sequence in which comedy at its most inspired and suspense at its most excruciating are ingeniously interwoven—the climb is the grand finale to the superb gags

that precede it. As he climbs higher and higher, more complex obstacles confront him, from a flock of pigeons to entanglement in a net, to a painter's trestle, to a swinging window, to the clock itself. "Each new floor is like a stanza in a poem," wrote Pulitzer Prize-winning author, poet, and critic James Agee. While Lloyd navigates these travails, the audience's hysteria escalates. It was not uncommon for 1920s spectators to hide their eyes or even faint when watching these portions of the film. Many cinemas reportedly hired a nurse or kept ambulances on call outside the theater.

Lloyd never revealed exactly how his most famous sequence was achieved, but a report by journalist

and writer Adela Rogers St. John, Lloyd's autobiography, later interviews with Lloyd, still photographs, and Los Angeles topography reveal how the climb was accomplished. Few special effects were available at the time, and the techniques that could be employed—such as mirrors, double exposure, glass shots, or hanging miniatures—were not used. The production worked from three different buildings at various stages of the climb (Broadway and Spring Street, Broadway and Ninth, and Broadway and Sixth) and shot from angles that could accomplish an overemphasis of perspective and distance.

Lloyd was a good athlete and did many of the climb shots himself, but there were limits. His insurance company did not allow him to do the entire sequence; an injury to the star could shut down the entire production and jeopardize the studio. Also, Lloyd had only one complete hand—the result of an accident in 1919 in which he lost his right thumb and forefinger. (The disfigurement was concealed in films with a specially made flesh-colored glove).

Lloyd was hanging on a clock built on a platform near the edge of the top of a building at 908 South Broadway. Again, the crew used in-camera tricks designed to conceal the platform—which was approximately fifteen feet below, out of frame—and perspective shots to make the clock appear on the side, not on top, of the building. High angle shots of the busy streets below contributed to the illusion of height. To this day, the effect is remarkable. Although many techniques of silent cinema appear dated, the climb is still completely convincing. The clock sequence remains one of the most effective and thrilling moments in film comedy—a visual metaphor for the upwardly mobile everyman of the 1920s and the extent to which he climbs to achieve the American Dream.

Safety Last!—and the genius of Harold Lloyd—continues to dangle over all who attempt to fuse comedy and thrills in the movies.

— JEFFREY VANCE

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The long shots of Lloyd climbing the building were not Lloyd but Bill Strother (who climbed the International Bank Building in Los Angeles on September 17, 1922, with four cameras covering the action, under the supervision of Roach). For a few additional moments (such as the two shots in which Lloyd swings the length of the building by a rope), a circus acrobat was used. For one shot—in which Lloyd hangs from the building edge as a result of a mouse crawling up the leg of his trousers—assistant director Robert A. Golden (who routinely doubled for Lloyd from 1921 to 1927) "hung in."

Audiences naturally assume that Harold Lloyd was actually hanging off the clock hands many stories above the street, and they are correct. However,

Height-Defying Thrills

by Lea Stans

During the early 20th century, as fresh skyscrapers carved vertical skylines into America's cities and more and more airplanes were flying overhead, there was a palpable sense of adventure and excitement in the air. The modern era had begun, with all its technological advancements, and audiences clamored for exciting new forms of entertainment. For the first time circus artists, vaudevillians, and stunt performers realized that the sky wasn't the limit. Wing-walkers began dancing on biplanes, "human flies" crawled up ever taller buildings, escape artists dangled over vast heights—a whole new world of thrills had opened up for daredevils willing to risk life and limb.

Artful Escapes

In 1900 Harry Houdini quickly rose to fame performing his gasp-inducing escapes on vaudeville's stages and out-of-doors. From his well-known handcuff and straitjacket escapes to being locked in water-filled chambers and digging himself out of graves, he was forever outdoing himself to deliver spectator thrills. Some stunts he had mastered were given vertigo-inducing twists, such as wriggling free from a straitjacket while tethered upside-down to a crane. In the late 1910s, he added "film star" to his résumé, appearing in the action-serial *The Master Mystery* and features like *The Grim Game* and *Terror Island*, stunting for the camera and a much bigger audience.

Steeplejacks and "Exploitation Men"

The skyscraper stunt in Harold Lloyd's *Safety Last!* had ample precedents in the real world. From 1905 to 1929 cool-headed steeplejacks—often

nicknamed "human flies"—scaled tall buildings for rapt crowds below, usually only with their bare hands. One of the most prolific was Harry H. Gardiner, who conquered more than seven hundred buildings stateside then moved to Europe when New York passed legislation outlawing the climbing of "the outer walks of buildings." What he did thereafter is lost to history, although some speculate it was his unidentified body found at the foot of the Eiffel Tower in 1933.

For his climbs "Crazy Jack" Williams often split any earnings with a local charity and during World War I raised money for the Red Cross. Working without any gear, Williams's grip strength was so phenomenal that he could easily crush a raw potato with one fist. To add flair to his public feats he might stop halfway up a building for a casual smoke or shimmy up the flagpole at its top.

Hal Olver used his nerves of steel to become a go-to "exploitation man" for studios like Paramount,

Goldwyn, and R-C Pictures, promoting the latest movies with his stunts. As described in *Exhibitors Herald*, Olver promoted the 1921 Sessue Haya-kawa film *Where Lights Are Low* by being hoisted upside-down in a straitjacket from the fifth floor of a building. He then "disengaged himself from his trappings and, it is natural to assume, unfurled the banner which gave out information of the picture engagement."

"Bird" on a Wire

Not all fearless building stunts involved climbing—in Bird Millman's case skyscrapers served as anchors for her tightrope walking. One of America's most renowned circus performers, Millman was a professional wire-walker at a young age and by 1913 was a center-ring performer for Barnum and Bailey. She was known for her exceptional grace and speed, and circus flyers would proclaim: "'Wirewalker' is a misnomer—she does not walk, she runs upon it, dances and swings in so fearless a fashion." To help sell war bonds she performed on a wire strung across Broadway in New York City, suspended a dizzying twenty-five stories in the air. She also lent her breezy talents to two feature films in 1920, *The Deep Purple* and *The Law of the Yukon*.

Barnstormers and Flying Circuses

Thanks to a lack of regulations, risking death on a daily basis could be a full-time career for some intrepid aviators who soon turned barnstorming into a nationwide sensation. Minnesota-born Gladys Roy was one of several pilots in her family. Initially a parachute jumper, she started barnstorming in

the 1920s and was soon attracting attention for wing-walking feats like dancing the Charleston or playing tennis. Her turn in the movies ended prematurely after she was thrown from a horse during the production of 1925's *The Fighting Ranger*. Sadly, her aviation career also came to a sudden end when she died after accidentally walking into a spinning propeller in 1927 at twenty-five years old.

The niece of Wild West show legend Buffalo Bill, Mabel Cody was the owner and promoter of Mabel Cody's Flying Circus, one of the many roaming teams of aerial entertainers. She and her barnstormers performed at fairs and promotional events across the country. While Mabel wasn't a pilot herself, she reportedly was the first woman to do a transfer from a speeding auto onto a plane via rope ladder, both moving at a heady seventy miles per hour.

One of the most famous barnstormers was the dashing Ormer Locklear, who some consider the pioneer of wing-walking. While serving in the U.S. Army Air Service, he began repairing airplanes midair, astonishing his fellow servicemen. After an honorable discharge in 1919 he turned to barnstorming full-time. Proclaiming "'Safety second' is my motto," he dangled from planes, did handstands on the wings, and jumped from one plane to another for adoring crowds. He also jumped over to Hollywood, starring in the 1919 feature *The Great Air Robbery*. Tragically, while filming a nighttime stunt for 1920's *The Skywayman*, he was blinded by the arc lights and died when his plane went down. Ads for the posthumously released film shamelessly capitalized on "His Death-Defying Feats And A Close Up Of His Spectacular Crash To Earth."



FORGOTTEN FACES

MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT BY THE SASCHA JACOBSEN ENSEMBLE

DIRECTED BY VICTOR SCHERTZINGER, USA, 1928

CAST Clive Brook, William Powell, Olga Baclanova, and Mary Brian **PRODUCTION** Paramount Famous Lasky Corp. **PRINT SOURCE** Library of Congress

Whatever became of the gentleman thief? The silk-hatted crook, who brought such debonair gallantry to his work that it would be a pleasure to be relieved of your jewelry by him, was once common on the silver screen—Raymond Griffith in *Paths to Paradise* (1925), Herbert Marshall in *Trouble in Paradise* (1932), and William Powell in *Jewel Robbery* (1932) all embodied the type with light-fingered aplomb. Alas, he seems to have gone the way of heliotrope, a scent that plays a starring role in *Forgotten Faces*. Here, the suavely unflappable Clive Brook, he of the adamant upper lip, plays “Heliotrope” Harry, an honorable man of immaculate manners and grooming who just happens to steal for a living. Victor Schertzinger’s film, one of four movie adaptations of Richard Washburn Child’s 1919 story “A Whiff of Heliotrope,” uses clever flourishes of style and a slyly tongue-in-cheek tone to glide through the story’s more far-fetched or cloyingly sentimental passages, like someone treading carefully up a creaky staircase.

Forgotten Faces was a milestone in the career of producer David O. Selznick, who later called it his “first real production” after moving to Paramount. The film kicks off with a magnificently staged casino heist, introduced by a boldly stylized shot looking up through a roulette wheel ringed by the faces of gamblers. The camera then floats through the room in a fluid crane shot, mirroring

the restless movements of women in sparkling, beaded gowns—until they all suddenly stop and raise their hands, startled by the holdup men, still off screen. Surveying the haul of jewelry, Harry disdainfully tosses back a dowager’s paste pearls and respectfully returns another woman’s wedding ring, telling her that marriage is “the one human institution I believe in.” This is an ironic cue for a cut to his wife back home, drunkenly banging a piano and carousing with a sleazy lover, while ignoring the cries of her neglected child and gleefully recounting how she tipped off the cops to her husband’s planned robbery.

Olga Baclanova sinks her teeth into the role of Lily—the world’s worst wife and mother—and chews it to bits. Pinballing between demonic laughter, eye-bugging terror, and a resplendent funk of dissipation, she turns out another in her series of deliciously depraved villainesses (the same year, she played the heavy-breathing Duchess Josiana in *The Man Who Laughs*). Paramount’s publicity department, which dubbed her “the Russian tigress,” claimed that during the big confrontation scene in *Forgotten Faces* she hurled expletives at Brook in her native tongue. When sound came in, Baclanova’s heavy Slavic accent slowed her career in Hollywood; ironically, this decline may have driven her to take the role for which she is best remembered, as the despicable, ill-fated trapeze artist Cleopatra in Tod Browning’s once-reviled, now-classic *Freaks* (1932).

When Harry arrives home to find his wife in bed with another man, he is framed in the doorway, face rigid with cold fury. A cloud of smoke suddenly envelops him, conveying with elegant economy that he has shot his rival, the crime for which he will be sent to jail. From here, the story becomes an unusual melodrama of father-love, as Harry devotes himself to saving his daughter, Alice, from his wife's malevolent schemes. Brook is tender and playful in scenes with the infant Alice (Brook's charming, natural warmth with children also comes out in the progressive domestic drama from 1925, *The Home Maker*, which features perhaps his finest performance), though his mooning over her once she is grown up (now played by Mary Brian) comes off as slightly creepy. The passage of years while Harry languishes in prison is deftly illustrated through a succession of photographs of Alice sent to him by his faithful partner, Froggy (William Powell). Powell, who later became the epitome of urbane sophistication once the talkies introduced his warm, attractive voice and witty line delivery, here gives a rather broadly comic performance as Harry's déclassé sidekick, though his good-hearted character is a change from the heavies he often played at this stage in his career.

Victor Schertzinger took an unusual path to becoming a film director. A child prodigy on the violin, he first came to the film industry as a composer, hired by Thomas H. Ince to write a score for *Civilization* (1916). While he became a prolific director, he continued to compose film scores and popular songs, the best-known of which are "I Remember You" and "Tangerine," both with lyricist Johnny Mercer. Fittingly, he ended his career (he died in 1941) with a series of musicals starring Bing Crosby, including *Rhythm on the River*, *The Birth of the Blues*, and two "Road" pictures with Hope and Crosby. Schertzinger saw a connection

between cinema and music, stating in 1918: "The photo-play, which has become distinctive art, is developed much along the same lines as a musical composition ... The composer must use the variations of tone, the divisions of time, the modulations of volume, the crescendo, the diminuendo, etc. The director has at his command the diversity of scenery, the various modes of expression in living beings, the effects of lights, the contrasting of locations and character, etc. But in the picture as in music there must be harmony."

Forgotten Faces amply illustrates this theory, moving between contrasting locations: from a swank casino to a stark, cheerless jail; from a shabby room in a boardinghouse, where a disheveled Lily wakes with a bottle of gin and an ashtray full of cigarette butts by her bed, to the lofty mansion where Alice is raised by her wealthy adoptive parents, and where Harry insinuates himself by posing as a butler. There are lighting effects, including some marvelous proto-noir shots of shadowy staircases, which display the skills of cinematographer J. Roy Hunt. There are variations in tone, setting up a counterpoint between the sweet and the bitter, the tender and the cruel, the lightly comic and the tensely dramatic. Harry even loses his cool at one point, flailing and clawing at the wire mesh in the prison visiting room when his wife taunts him with her plan to ruin their daughter out of pure spite.

Desperate to escape so he can thwart her, Harry tries to take advantage of an attempted jailbreak by a brutal inmate known as "Spider," played by the unforgettably mean-faced Fred Kohler, who had appeared as gang boss Buck Mulligan the year before in Josef von Sternberg's dazzling gangster drama *Underworld* with Brook. That film kicked off Sternberg's golden period at Paramount: in 1928, he made *The Last Command*, costarring a villainous William Powell, and *Docks of New York*,



in which Baclanova gives one of her most appealing and sympathetic performances. Sternberg's influence on *Forgotten Faces* is felt in the expressionistic shadows and jazzy camera angles, though this innovative style is applied to an old-fashioned story of redemption through self-sacrifice, with a plot that topples over into the charmingly ludicrous as Harry masterminds a scheme to terrorize Lily with the scent of heliotrope.

Reviews of *Forgotten Faces* were split between praise for the quality of the acting, cinematography, and general stylishness, and raspberries for the credulity-straining plot and stale whiff of Victorian sentiment. Despite this, the story, which had already been filmed in 1920, was remade twice more: in 1936, starring Herbert Marshall and directed by

E.A. Dupont, and as a B-picture in 1942. Richard Washburn Child, meanwhile, moved on from crime fiction to become a propagandist for Mussolini, ghost-writing an "autobiography" serialized in the *Saturday Evening Post* and shilling for Il Duce in the Hearst press, until he had a change of heart and started the Republicans for Roosevelt League in 1932. If only the fascist strongman were as quaint a relic as the gentleman thief.

— IMOGEN SARA SMITH

SCHERTZINGER TROTS OUT A FEW NEW IDEAS IN SHOTS

Except where cuts are used to increase tempo, there should be as few of them in a picture as possible. That is something so obvious that it always should have been part of the directors' creed, but it is only during the past few months that I have noticed any distinct evidence indicating that those who make pictures are beginning to realize it. In some situations either the dramatic or comedy effect is heightened by quick cuts from one character to another, but such a situation does not arise once in a score of pictures. In all other cases where it is possible a pan or a traveling shot should be used in order that the eye of the audience can move smoothly with the lens and not be taxed by the jerk that always comes with a cut. Care will have to be exercised in grouping for these moving shots or considerable footage will be taken up with walls, spaces or whatever else is in between two characters when the camera moves from one to the other. Meanwhile it is interesting to note the progress that is being made towards the elimination of unnecessary cuts. In his latest picture, *Forgotten Faces*—a very good picture, by the way—Victor Schertzinger, by his method of handling one scene, avoids the use of cuts, inserts and titles. We see Clive Brook being arrested for murder. Next we see him in jail. We need to know how long he has been there, and what has happened to his baby who was about one year old when he was arrested. How are you going to put over all that without cuts, inserts or titles? When we discovered Brook in jail he is facing the camera, gazing at something in his hand. The camera moves around behind him without a cut and we

look over his shoulder and see that he is looking at a photograph of his baby. From an envelope he draws one photograph after another, each showing the daughter's progress from babyhood to maturity. It is an effective scene and tells a whole story in itself without one break in the photography. All the way through his picture Schertzinger shows a refreshing disregard for most of the traditions that have been hampering screen art. Brook has the leading role, but we are not told what his name is or who he is. We learn from spoken titles that William Powell plays a character called "Froggy," but we don't know where he comes from or where he goes to. There are no introductions in the entire picture, and no footage is devoted to telling us anything that we do not need to know. Victor's direction brings out all the pictorial value of the scenes and the dramatic quality of the story, and would have been flawless if he had averaged his performances more evenly between too much repression and too much animation. This is purely a technical complaint, however, as neither sin is committed so flagrantly as to lessen the entertainment value of the gripping but human story that the director has told on the screen with admirable directness, feeling and force. It is one of the best pictures that have come from the Paramount lot this year. The value to a picture of casting real artists in small parts is in evidence here. There is a brief scene in which Hedda Hopper finds Brook's baby on her door-step. We do not see Miss Hopper again, but when the picture is over we remember that sweetness, the tenderness and the mother love that she puts into her one short appearance on the

screen. Crauford Kent appears but for a moment as a butler, but during that moment makes his bit so convincing and real that it is a considerable contribution to the sincerity of the production. Brook is too repressed. I do not know how the public will take it, but I think he has carried his impassiveness just one performance too far. There is no screen entertainment in a man who can light a cigarette or commit murder without a change of expression. Baclanova—no other name on the screen—shows

a tendency to go too far in the other direction. If there be any truth in the report that Paramount is grooming her to succeed Pola Negri, I would like to suggest timidly that it will be time wasted. Miss Baclanova is a superb actress, but she does not possess the quality out of which stars are made. *Forgotten Faces* is a picture that I can recommend unreservedly to all exhibitors. —W.B.



From the August 18, 1928, issue of *The Film Spectator*, written by the always opinionated, knowledgeable, and witty **Welford Beaton**. He was founder, publisher, and main voice of the biweekly from its inception in 1926 through 1931, when he redubbed it *The Hollywood Spectator* and took on a new associate, playwright Robert E. Sherwood, as well as a young writer, Dalton Trumbo. They immediately began sparring on its pages, with Beaton setting the bar early in their introduction to readers: "My only request to my associates was that they were to pan me on their pages when I write things they don't like. Bob Sherwood, the base ingrate, has started it already." But before all that, he gave his son, the teenaged Donald, a regular column titled, *As They Appeal to a Youth*, capsule film reviews expressing opinions as forthright as his father's, often but not always in agreement with them. In his 1928 review of *Forgotten Faces*, the younger Beaton praised Schertzinger's direction, too, but also singled out William Powell: "at last in a part worthy of his talents, [he] gives a perfect performance. I always have mentioned and always will mention that Powell is the cleverest heavy on the screen, and should be given bigger parts."

PROGRAM BOOK CONTRIBUTORS

Former editor of the magazine of Film Arts Foundation **SHARI KIZIRIAN** edits the San Francisco Silent Film Festival program books and slide shows.

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KYLE WESTPHAL programs and preserves films at Chicago Film Society. Under CFS's banner, he has programmed and hosted monthly silent screenings at the Music Box Theatre since 2017.

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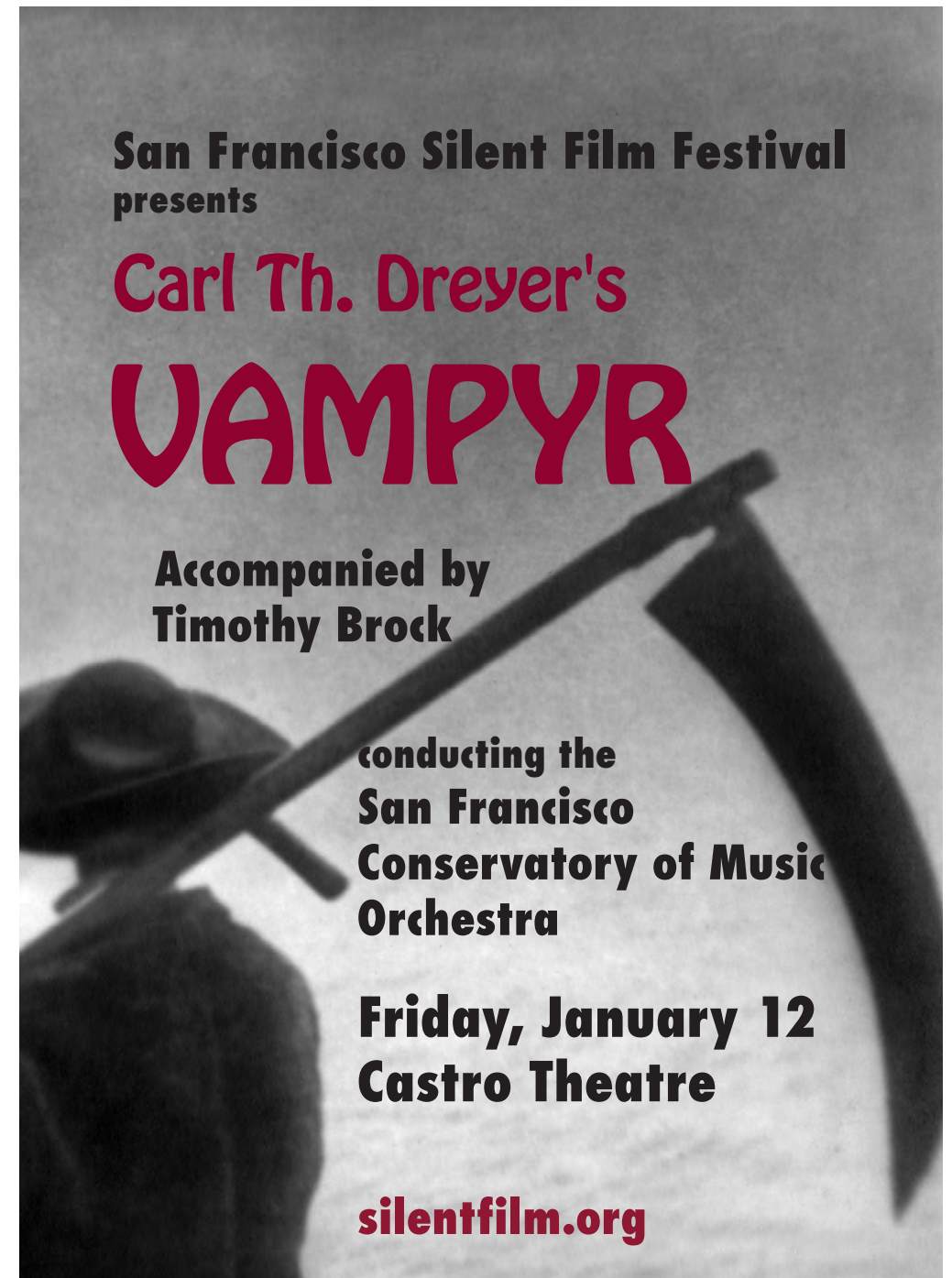
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Photo by Pamela Gemille

GARY HOBISH, 1953–2023

We are still stunned by the death this October of our great friend, the musician and audio engineer extraordinaire Gary Hobish. Since 1997, Gary did the invisible work of the festival in the back of the theater, in the dark, at his soundboard, hardly seen but always heard, making sure the accompanists and speakers sounded their best. Over the years, his professionalism and bend-over-backwards helpfulness earned the respect of SFSFF's many performers. Integral to the Bay Area music scene for decades, Gary has too many stellar credits to list here. He was a man of many enthusiasms, including swing dancing—which he was doing in Golden Gate Park on a sunny Sunday when he died. We thank him for always making us sound good. We miss him.



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