



SAN FRANCISCO  
**SILENT**  
FILM FESTIVAL

ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S  
**THE  
MANXMAN**

Accompanied by the  
Oakland Symphony  
Conducted by Ben Palmer

Grace Cathedral  
January 11, 2025



# OAKLAND SYMPHONY

## BEN PALMER, CONDUCTOR

### FIRST VIOLIN

Terrie Baune  
Vivian Warkentin  
Carla Picchi  
Ellen Granningen

### SECOND VIOLIN

David Cheng  
Baker Peebles  
Candace Sanderson

### VIOLA

Tatiana Trono  
Alex Volonts

### CELLO

Michael Graham  
Paul Rhodes

### BASS

Patrick McCarthy

### FLUTE/PICCOLO

Alice Lenaghan

### OBOE/ENGLISH HORN

Robyn Smith

### CLARINET

Rebecca Tobin

### BASSOON

Carolyn Lockhart

### HORN

Eric Achen

### TIMPANI/PERCUSSION

Fred Morgan

### HARP

Kristin Lloyd

Music composed by Stephen Horne,  
orchestrated by Ben Palmer



Left: Maestro Ben Palmer (photo by Arturs Kondrats)

Right: Composer Stephen Horne at the 2012 Cannes Film Festival

# ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S THE MANXMAN

UK, 1929, British International Pictures

Anny Ondra, Carl Brisson, Malcolm Keen



## “IT WAS NOT A HITCHCOCK MOVIE,”

the director told François Truffaut. So what on earth is *The Manxman*? It is a romantic melodrama, a tragic story of a love triangle set in small fishing community on the Isle of Man. It's a torrid tale of extramarital sex, guilt, and terrible fate—the adaptation of an outrageously popular, and plain outrageous, novel by Hall Caine. When it was published in 1894, local poet T.E. Brown wrote in a letter to a friend: “The island is all in a shiver about Hall Caine. ‘Worse than Tess!’ so they say. Ladies can't admit that they read *The Manxman*.” It was a box-office smash, and critically acclaimed, too. *The Bioscope* praised its “remarkable power and gripping interest,” and the *Daily Chronicle* asserted it would “enhance the prestige of British pictures abroad.” It is one of the most beautiful films in the catalog of Alfred Hitchcock, with sparkling cinematography by Jack E. Cox. In fact, it is very possibly the director's finest silent, and the last film that he shot completely without sound.

Hitchcock concedes one point to Truffaut: that *The Manxman* is of interest because it “suggested the talkies.” Indeed, this is a rare silent that seems impatient to talk, or at least hyperaware of its own silence. Characters converse behind glass, their dialogue a secret, as helpless spectators watch and worry. And when a confession has to be made, the kind of confession that made *The Manxman* a novel that nice women lied about reading, the leading lady mouths her truth to the camera in

close-up. There is no intertitle to translate her words, a choice likely made for delicacy's sake. However, Hitchcock surely counted on the audience's close attention to her lips, their hunger to know her sordid secret: “I am going ... to have ... [her head tilts down, her mouth still just visible] a baby.” You sense he enjoyed that. A similar trick will be pulled later on when the doctor innocently informs the wrong man: “You're a father!”

But that is to get ahead of ourselves. The plot of *The Manxman* is a juicy one. Hitchcock quickly sketches for us the social dynamic of a harbor town, with its collective of hardworking fishermen and the rowdy tavern where they congregate. Among this crowd, Pete Quilliam and Philip Christian have been friends since childhood. Pete (played by twinkly-eyed Danish actor Carl Brisson) is on the boats, but Philip (British stage and screen actor Malcolm Keen) has led a more privileged life and is now a lawyer, working toward the prize of being appointed “Deemster,” a senior judge in the Manx courts. Pete is in love with Kate, the daughter of the innkeeper. Trouble is, so is Philip. To win Kate's hand, Pete leaves to make his fortune in South Africa, but Philip and Kate draw closer in his absence. When Pete is reported dead overseas, the lovers act on their feelings. However, fate has other plans. For one, Pete is alive, and he is coming home to surprise them.

Brisson's puppy-dog optimism and Keen's austere glare provide a striking contrast.

The two are often shown side by side but worlds apart in demeanor. The key to this film is the woman who stands between them, Kate. At one point Estelle Brody, the American star of *Hindle Wakes* (Maurice Elvey, 1927) was attached to *The Manxman*, but Hitchcock hired instead another foreign star, Anny Ondra, who had recently made a couple pictures with his former mentor Graham Cutts. She was well liked in the British industry and *Kine Weekly* heralded her casting by writing: "The leading lady is Anny Ondra, that bewitching little Czecho-Slovakian lady who one of these days may, I hope, be cast in a role suited to her piquant personality." As Kate, Ondra exploits her soft sleepy eyes and fragile posture to portray a woman in love, confusion, and mortal terror—who is also impishly seductive. She looks exquisite framed by the rocks of the Cornish coast, dashing to the sands to meet her lover. She is pitifully dejected walking down the stairs of her marital home without her infant daughter, fidgeting with a plan to extend her departure. Ondra is the first true "Hitchcock blonde," and she built upon this appearance in Hitchcock's next film *Blackmail* (1929), a thriller entirely in his characteristic style.

Filming began in August 1928, shortly after the birth of the Hitchcock's only child, Patricia. It had been a tough labor, for the father. "I nearly died of the suspense," he joked. While Hitch made *The Manxman*, his wife, Alma Reville, was otherwise engaged, both with the baby and with writing the script for Henrik Galeen's *After the Verdict* (1929), the last film she ever worked on not directed by her husband.

Could Alma's absence from the production possibly account for Hitchcock's low opinion of the film? It seems typically perverse, and yet emotionally quite astute, for this new father to make a film in which the birth of a baby is depicted as such a mixed blessing, greeted with more sorrow than delight. In *The Manxman*, both "fathers" suffer extreme versions of the anxieties Hitchcock knew during the birth of his own child: frantic nerves on the part of one, queasy guilt on the part of the other.

Hitchcock left his blessings behind when he traveled to Cornwall in the far southwest of England for the location shooting. Apparently having misled the trades into believing the film would be shot in the authentic Isle of Man locations, after a brief stop in the vicinity to shoot Pete's departure from Liverpool, they chose instead a spot 250 miles south of the book's setting. The scenery in the film is picturesque, but unmistakably Cornish. While on location, the Cockney director did not ingratiate himself with the locals. Perhaps the stress of having a tiny mouth to feed was testing his nerves. One notable row was with the innkeeper about the cost of his room. He was quibbling over less than a shilling, and it was a bill that the studio would take care of anyway. He ground out a win and, to celebrate his pointless victory, treated the cast and crew to several bottles of champagne, an indulgence he let them believe was a personal gift, not, as it actually was, another line in the production budget.

Still, the film was mostly shot in Elstree, returning Hitchcock to home and hearth, and allowing the trades a certain amount



of access to the set. The reporter from *Kine Weekly* managed to watch Hitch shooting the love scene at Kate's window, and marveled at how the actors could muster sweet nothings with such distractions as the "sputterings of the lamps, the blinding illumination at close quarters and the perilous foothold of the affectionate pair." Most striking of all, the "intermittently obscured sun-arc," which Hitch explained replicated the beam of the lighthouse, "which forms something of a 'light-motive,' so to speak, in the picture. It is certainly something of an inspiration." It is unsure which, the director or reporter, was pulling the other's leg with the pronunciation of leitmotif, but it's worth singling out this "inspiration." That pulsing beam is seen again when Kate returns to the water's edge in suicidal depression. Another image with a darkly twinned meaning: when Kate and Philip consummate their love, it is in the mill cottage, with the stones

rubbing suggestively to represent their closeness. The same stones are used as props in her father's sermon of a wedding speech, threatening retribution to those who disrespect their wedding vows: "the mills of God grind slowly."

The director's use of such circularity, of metaphorical double-entendre and lighting cues to represent psychological turmoil, later added finesse to genuine "Hitchcock movies" for decades more. Here, in a picture he judged "very banal," he likely felt there was too much adherence to Hall Caine's novel and too little room for his own flashes of inspiration. And yet, who else but Hitchcock could conjure the romantic pictorialism and terrible foreboding of this tale of guilt and secrecy? And to borrow his own famous phrase, who else would dare to turn a new bride's pregnancy into a bomb under the dinner table?

— PAMELA HUTCHINSON



# SCORING HITCHCOCK

**T**he first time he accompanied *The Manxman*, years ago, Stephen Horne was solo on piano. When the British Film Institute set out to restore the surviving Hitchcock silents, the archive commissioned Horne, longtime resident pianist at its Southbank theater, to revisit the film for the restoration's premiere in 2012. His resultant music for a five-piece ensemble reflects his deep dive into Manx musical traditions, as it incorporates the violin, an instrument typical to the island's music, and weaves in Methodist hymns, the official Manx national anthem, and the anthem of the Manx diaspora, "Ellan Vannin" (Manx Gallic for Isle of Man). He recalls having immersed himself so thoroughly in the research that his own melodies began to sound like Manx folk tunes, and, by the end, "they were coming out as idiomatic." A love triangle that plays out among a tight-knit, isolated, and religiously strict seaside community, the film mixes quiet intimacies with operatic-level drama as all the villagers witness—and are, in part, responsible for—the heart-break of the three principals. Horne has long since felt the score merited orchestral treatment.

Enter Ben Palmer. A trumpeter and composer by training, the London-based Palmer is recognized as one of the world's foremost conductors for "live-to-picture" performances. The phenomenon of live orchestral accompaniment for "talkies" is generally traced back to André Previn conducting the Los Angeles Philharmonic playing Prokofiev's score with Eisenstein's *Alexander Nevsky* in 1987. It was met with

wide acclaim yet was an idea that needed simmering. Only in this century have live accompaniments for sound films become an evening's entertainment. In the United States, orchestras like the Hollywood Bowl and the Boston Pops, progenitor of popular music orchestras in America, had for a long time incorporated tunes from movie musicals and, later, recognizable pieces of film scores. In the early 1990s, under conductors John Mauceri and John Williams, respectively, they added clips shows. Two-plus decades later, when Williams, who is primarily known as Steven Spielberg's go-to film composer, began licensing his scores for live-to-picture screenings of complete movies, he chose Palmer as someone he knew would honor both the music and the films. Palmer has since conducted orchestras, mostly around Europe, for the *Star Wars* trilogy, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, and *E.T., the Extra-Terrestrial*, among many others.

**P**almer's very first live-to-picture concert was actually for a silent film—just not one from the silent era. In December 2013, he accompanied the 1982 Oscar-nominated animation based on the children's book, *The Snowman*, conducting Howard Blake's score in a show that has become a holiday tradition for Palmer. "It's very tricky, with hundreds of sync points to hit, including a snowball hitting a window, lights switching on and off, a musical sneeze, a whale's tail splashing, snowmen dancing and clapping in time to the music," he says. "Once I'd recovered from the shock of how difficult it was the first time, I fell in

love with conducting to film.” In addition to his sound film accompaniments, he has built up an impressive silent-era repertoire, conducting scores by Charles Chaplin and Carl Davis for several Chaplin films and various scores by Neil Brand, including for *South*, the 1919 documentary about Shackleton’s tragic Antarctic expedition, and for another Hitchcock restoration, *The Lodger*, which closed the Pordenone Silent Film Festival in 2019. When Horne sought a collaborator to expand *The Manxman*, Palmer was the natural choice. In fact, composer and conductor also simultaneously prepared Horne’s original score for the restoration of *Stella Dallas*, which premiered at the 2022 Venice Biennial.

For *The Manxman*, Horne first had to set down his music for quintet, as about thirty percent of the score was improvised during screenings. He had led on piano, playing accordion as well, and four other musicians took on one or more instruments that included flute, oboe, fiddle, viola, percussion, and harp. (San Francisco audiences may remember that Horne accompanied the film with a modified score for piano and harp at SFSFF’s Hitchcock Nine event in 2013.)

Palmer then took the written score and fleshed it out for a chamber orchestra with flute, piccolo, clarinet, bassoon, oboe, English horn, a small string section, and percussion that includes the Celtic frame drum, the bodhrán. Horne and Palmer decided to carry over the two solos from the quintet, oboe and violin, which Palmer says are “almost like characters in the story, and carry much of the musical material and emotional weight.”

**W**hile Horne and his magical accompaniments are well known to SFSFF audiences, having regularly performed here since 2007, Palmer makes his festival debut with *The Manxman*. He conducted in the city for the first time in late November of last year guiding the San Francisco Symphony in a live-to-picture presentation of *Top Gun: Maverick*. How is it different to prepare for a silent versus a sound film? “Conducting silent movies is the purest form of film with orchestra,” says Palmer. “Unlike sound films where I usually have some technology to help me stay in time ... with silents I just watch the same screen as the audience. It’s incredibly demanding and precarious, but the freedom from technology allows me to conduct with true expression, molding and shaping the music in the moment ... and hopefully still get the snare drum rifle shots in the right place!”

## BEN PALMER

Ben Palmer is one of the world’s most sought after specialists in conducting live to picture. Personally authorized by John Williams to conduct his film scores in concert and acclaimed by Hans Zimmer as “a masterclass in conducting,” Palmer is artistic director of Covent Garden Sinfonia and chief conductor of Babylon Orchester Berlin and the Orchestra da Camera di Pordenone. He has a repertoire of more than fifty films that includes *Metropolis*, *Modern Times*, and *The Gold Rush*. He premiered his orchestration of Stephen Horne’s score for *The Manxman* at the Pordenone Silent Film Festival in 2022. [benpalmer.net/@conductorben](http://benpalmer.net/@conductorben)

## OAKLAND SYMPHONY

Founded in 1933, Oakland Symphony has long been lauded as a symphonic organization unlike any other, making classical music accessible to the area’s entire community by designing programs to attract wide-ranging, culturally-diverse audiences. Throughout the years, the Symphony has fostered collaborations with local arts organizations, from children’s choruses to jazz ensembles. To ensure the future of symphonic music, the Symphony regularly commissions works by composers who have never before written for a full orchestra. [oaklandsymphony.org](http://oaklandsymphony.org)

## STEPHEN HORNE

One of the leading silent film accompanists working today, Stephen Horne has been house pianist at London’s BFI Southbank for thirty years and regularly performs to widespread acclaim at international

venues. Although principally a pianist, he often incorporates other instruments into his performances, sometimes playing them simultaneously. For the 2012 BFI London Film Festival, he received commissions to compose ensemble scores for the premieres of the restorations of two silent Alfred Hitchcock films, *The First Born* and *The Manxman*.

## SAN FRANCISCO SILENT FILM FESTIVAL

San Francisco Silent Film Festival is dedicated to the presentation and preservation of silent cinema, and to demonstrating silent films as a relevant art form for modern audiences and as culturally valuable historical records. SFSFF presents live-cinema events that showcase important titles from the silent era, often in restored or preserved prints, with superb live musical accompaniment. [silentfilm.org](http://silentfilm.org)



Ben Palmer. Photo by Arturs Kondrats



Stephen Horne. Photo by Pamela Gentile

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