

Modern Matinees: Iris Barry's History of Film

Dec 2-31

The founding of the MoMA Film Library (now the Department of Film) on June 25, 1935 was a catalyst for the study of the motion picture as art in the United States. The function of the Film Library according to Iris Barry, its first curator, was to “trace, catalog, assemble, exhibit and circulate to museums and colleges single films or programs of films.” These are methodologies the Department of Film adheres to more than 80 years after its establishment.

Using Barry's 1935 publication *Film Notes* as a guide post, *Modern Matinees: Iris Barry's History of Film* endeavors to reconstruct a range of those earliest programs originally organized in six thematic series and three monographic compilations. This broad re-consideration of those films Barry regarded as key for their “pervasive social effect...and as the only new art-form of modern times” commences with the devastating *A Fool There Was* (1915), explores the dawn of sound with *The Jazz Singer* (1927) and includes the animation classic *Steamboat Willie* (1928). Each of the films in this series became early acquisitions, building the Film Library's emergent collection.

Organized by Anne Morra, Associate Curator, Department of Film.

Un Chapeau de paille d'Italie. (The Italian Straw Hat). 1928. France. Directed and adapted by René Clair. Based on a play by Eugene Labiche, Marc Michel. With Albert Préjean, Alexis Bondireff, Paul Ollivier. 35mm. With French main titles, English intertitles. Musical score by Rinaldo Alessandrini. Approx. 84 min.

“For René Clair, the Labiche comedy had a quite particular appeal. It was not so much that its irreverence delighted him, or its unflagging pace, or its sharply delineated characters—though these qualities undoubtedly attracted him, as the film which he based on it most unquestionably reveals. Now in *The Italian Straw Hat* he was beautifully able to humor his own predilection for this past by adapting Labiche's play into a film which was not merely staged but costumed in the period of the cinema's birth but which was to look *as though* it had actually been filmed in 1895.

Mon, Dec 2, 1:30 T2

Hotel Imperial. 1927. USA. Directed by Mauritz Stiller. Written by Jules Furthman. Based on the novel *Színmy négy felvonásban* by Lajos Biró With Max Davidson, Pola Negri, James Hall. 35mm. Silent with musical accompaniment. Approx. 82 min.

“When Mauritz Stiller came to Hollywood in 1925 with Greta Garbo under his wing, the *foreign invasion* was at its height: European directors, cameramen and actors were being engaged by most of the major American companies. He did not succeed in directing any picture of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, the

company that brought him over, and made only the present film and *Street of Sin* (1928) before his death in 1928.”

Tue, Dec 3, 1:30 T2

Plane Crazy. 1928. USA. Directed by Walt Disney. Animation by Ub Iwerks. Silent with musical accompaniment. 16mm. 6 min.

“Mickey Mouse made his first appearance, like Oswald the Rabbit and other little creatures of the animated cartoons evolved by Walt Disney, as a silent figure. His creator took a long time before he was satisfied that he had achieved the proper nose, ears, whiskers and wardrobe for *the mouse form*, as the early Mickey is called at the Disney studio.”

The Last Command. 1928. USA. Directed by Josef von Sternberg. Story by Lajos Biró. Adapted by John F. Goodrich. With Emil Jannings, Evelyn Brent, William Powell. Silent with musical accompaniment. 35mm 88 min.

“Distinguished, like all the films directed by Josef von Sternberg, for its painstaking photographic quality. *The Last Command* was inspired by a real-life occurrence in the film centre. It gives a fairly accurate idea of the conditions under which films at the time were produced and is one of the few pictures in serious mood ever to have presented a study of life behind the scenes in a studio. The pathos inherent in the careers of the many extra and small-part players of Hollywood, especially the aging ones, lent itself admirably to the popular conception of the sort of role Emil Jannings should play.”

Wed, Dec 4, 1:30 T2

The Love Parade. 1929. USA. Directed by Ernst Lubitsch. Written by Guy Bolton, Ernst Vajda. Based on the play *The Prince Consort* by Jules Chancel, Leon Xanrof. With Maurice Chevalier, Jean Harlow, Lupino Lane.

Under Barry’s *The Musical-Talkie* category, she writes “*The Love Parade* is a picture of considerable importance in the history of the development of the sound film. Technically it was both visually and audibly far ahead of most of its contemporaries—the camera moves freely, whereas in the majority of 1929 films it was still anchored inside a sound-proof booth...”

Thu, Dec 5, 1:30; Mon, Dec 30, 1:30 T2 (Carson: pls let projectionists know this print has EXIT music)

Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari. (The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari). 1920. Germany. Directed by Robert Wiene. Written by Hans Janowitz, Carl Mayer. Based on a story by Hans Janowitz. With Conrad Veidt, Lil Dagover, Werner Krauss. Silent with musical accompaniment. German main titles and English intertitles. 35mm. Approx. 75 min.

“It was for its settings that *Caligari* was first acclaimed and has remained famous. They are not particularly cinematic and, indeed, hardly anything takes place in the film that could not have been

presented identically on a stage. They derive from expressionist paintings, through the settings of expressionist plays and particularly of *Der Sturm* group, on view in Berlin at that time. The actors, especially Krauss and Veidt, in make-up and in movement alike succeed in harmonizing with this atmosphere of unreality.”

Fri, Dec 6, 1:30 T2

Anna Christie. 1930. USA. Directed by Clarence Brown. Written by Frances Marion. Based on the play by Eugene O’Neill. With Greta Garbo, Charles Bickford, George F. Marion. DCP courtesy Warner Bros. 89 min.

“Artfully the film kept everyone waiting. For well over a reel, George Marion and Marie Dressler admirably sustain interest, and yet there is impatience to hear and to see Greta Garbo. At last the saloon door opens, the graceful-gawky figure appears, slouches over to the table, sits down, says to the waiter *Gif me a visky* in that haunting, husky growl.”

Mon, Dec 9, 1:30 T2

Little Caesar. 1931. USA. Directed by Mervyn LeRoy. Written by Francis Faragoh. Based on the novel by W.R. Burnett. With Edward G. Robinson, Glenda Farrell, Douglas Fairbanks.

Jay Leyda writes “The conscious moralizing of *Little Caesar* should not be overlooked. The film contains a motivating introduction and a reformist conclusion that are not indicated in Burnett’s more objective original, modelled on the undecorated and understated story-telling of Hemingway’s *The Killers*. This reformist approach, perhaps for the purpose of quieting censorship, is even more prominent in *The Public Enemy*, where Cagney’s rise from slum-boy to gang-leader tells a more closely knit story and moral.”

Tue, Dec 10, 1:30 T2

Hamlet. 1920. Denmark/Germany. Directed by Svend Gade, Heinz Schall. Adapted by Erwin Gepard. Based on the play by William Shakespeare. With Asta Nielsen, Paul Conradi, Hans Junkerman. DCP courtesy DFF-Deutsches Filminstitut & Filmmuseum. German and English intertitles. Music track by Michael Riessler. 110 min.

“The plot of this *Hamlet* is drawn from Danish history as recorded by Saxo Grammaticus in the 12th century from *Fratricide Punished*, a German drama possibly based on a lost pre-quarto Shakespearian version, and from the Shakespearean play as we know it. But its somewhat startling denouement, revealing that Hamlet was actually a woman, is derived from Edward P. Vining’s *The Mystery of Hamlet* (1881) a book from which the scenarist of the film drew both his characterization of Prince Hamlet and several incidents not met with in any other source.”

Wed, Dec 11, 1:30 T2

Greed. 1924. USA. Written and directed by Erich von Stroheim. Based on the novel *McTeague: A Story of San Francisco* by Frank Norris. With Jean Hersholt, Chester Conklin, Sylvia Ashton. 35mm print courtesy Warner Bros. Silent with musical accompaniment. 123 min.

Jay Leyda, Soviet film scholar and assistant to Iris Barry, wrote, "Eight years before, while von Stroheim was a movie extra, he had come upon this Norris novel and determined to make a film of it someday. When his chance came, von Stroheim insisted upon adapting the accumulative structure of the novel by including its every details and *filming every scene against its original background and not against studio-made imitations no matter how perfect they might be.*"

Thu, Dec 12, 1:30 T2

Great Actresses of the Past: 1911-16 program

Madame Sans-Gêne (excerpt). 1911. France. Directed by André Calmettes. Based on the play by Victorien Sardou. With Gabrielle Réjane.

La Dame aux camélias (excerpt). 1912. France. Directed by André Calmettes. Based on the play and novel by Alexandre Dumas. With Sara Bernhardt.

Vanity Fair (excerpt). 1915. USA. Directed by Eugene Nowland. Written by Eugene Nowland, Charles Sumner Williams. Based on the novel by William Makepeace Thackeray. With Minne Maddern Fiske.

Cenere (excerpt). 1916. Italy. Directed by Arturo Ambrosio, Febo Mari. Based on the play by Grazia Deledda. With Eleanora Duse.

DCP. Program running time: **63 min**. Silent with musical accompaniment.

"Nothing could be unkind, in a sense, than to exhibit as in this program the distinguished executants of one fully refined medium as they were translated into another unfamiliar medium still in the process of development. What is presented on screen is not the inimitable Bernhardt, the incomparable Duse but the thin shadow of stage celebrity. Yet since this is all that remains of these great actresses of the past, affection and curiosity unite to demand the preservation of their films."

Fri, Dec 13, 1:30 T2

Chess Fever. 1925. U.S.S.R. Directed by Vsevolod I. Pudovkin. Written by Vsevolod I. Pudovkin, Nikolai Shpikovskiy. With Jose Capablanca, Zakhar Darevsky, Natalie Glan. English main and intertitles. 35mm. Silent with musical accompaniment 20 min.

"Pudovkin was asked to make a topical comedy on the International Chess Tournament being held in Moscow's Hotel Metropol. The catch was that one could not ask the contestants, least of all José Capablanca, to act in a comedy. The film has a fund of simple satire and movie wit. The hero's extreme preoccupation with chess and the growing exasperation of the heroine cannot be imagined apart from (Lev) Kuleshov's ingenious cutting method."

Arsenal. 1929. U.S.S.R. Written and directed by Alexander Dovzhenko. With Ambrose Buchma, Pictor Masokha, Semyon Svashenko. 16mm. Silent with musical accompaniment. 95 min.

“The first masterpiece of the Ukrainian cinema broke entirely with traditional film structure and subject, depending solely on a flow of ideas and emotions rather than upon conflicts between individual characters to give continuity to the work. *Arsenal* is a film-poem about Ukraine from the World War, through the February and October Revolutions in Russia...”

Mon, Dec 16, 1:30 T2

Fragment of an Empire. 1929. U.S.S.R. Directed by Friedrich Ermler. Written by Friedrich Ermler, Katerina Vinogradskaya. With Sergei Gerasimov, Yakov Gudkin, Valeri Solovtsov. DCP courtesy the San Francisco Silent Film Festival. In Russian with English subtitles. Silent with musical accompaniment. 109 min.

“In the tradition of the propagandist film, *Fragment of an Empire*, deals with immediate social problems, but differs from the majority of the type in the quantity and problems touched and in the depth and acuteness of its criticism. Ermler and Vinogradskaya wrote into their scenario the most serious problems of the period—the human aspects of socialist construction, questions of new working relationships, of mass culture (and its misuses), and of marriage and modern domestic life, since private discord reacts upon social well-being.”

Tue, Dec 17, 1:30 T2

All Quiet on the Western Front. 1930. USA. Directed by Lewis Milestone. Screenplay by George Abbott, Maxwell Anderson, Del Andrews. Based on the novel by Erich Maria Remarque. With Lew Ayres, Slim Summerville, Louis Wilhelm. 35mm. 129 min.

“Speech which in earlier talkies had been carried on continuously occurs in *All Quiet* only in intimate scenes, which in silent films were punctuated with dialogue in the form of printed subtitles. Spacious scenes of action are accompanied only by sounds—the screech of shells and the din of warfare. What was remarkable about *All Quiet on the Western Front* at the time it was made was that not only did it employ spectacle and the moving camera, but it also was cut almost as freely as a silent film.”

Wed, Dec 19, 1:30 T2

The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. 1921. USA. Directed by Rex Ingram. Written by June Mathis. Based on the novel by Vicente Blasco Ibañez. With Wallace Beery, Alan Hale, Rudolph Valentino. 35mm. Silent with musical accompaniment. . Approx. 137 min.

“Mr. Terry Ramsaye, who recounts entertainingly in *A Million and One Nights* the circumstances under which *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* came to be made, states that it cost the considerable sum of \$640,000 and by the end of 1925 had grossed \$4,000,000. It had also established the reputation of its leading man, Rudolph Valentino, who became the idol of a cult that persists years after his death. The

scene in *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* in which Valentino most effectively registered his remarkable poise and grace was that of the dance in the Argentinian café. “

Thu, Dec 19, 1:30 T2

Broninsets Potemkin. (Battleship Potemkin). 1925. U.S.S.R. Written and directed by Sergei Eisenstein. Based on a scenario by Nina Agadzhanova-Shutko. With Alexander Antonov, Vladimir Barsky, Maxim Strauch. 35mm print courtesy Kino Lorber. Russian and English intertitles. 75 min. **(CARSON: PLS LET PROJECTIONISTS KNOW THIS PRINT HAS MUSIC ON TRACK)**

“Eisenstein’s theory of a performance as a series of *shock-attractions* was expanded out of the theater into cinema, where it more logically belonged. Aside from the almost legendary efficiency with which *Potemkin* was filmed (all shots of the funeral procession completed in one morning, the whole drama on the quarterdeck filmed in one day, etc.), (cinematographer Edward) Tisse’s ingenuity was ideal for Eisenstein’s invention. The slaughter on the steps needed filming techniques as original as the new principles.”

Fri, Dec 20, 1:30 T2

Dream of a Rarebit Fiend. 1906. USA. Directed by Edwin S. Porter. Written by Winsor McCay. With John P. Brown. 35mm. Silent with musical accompaniment. Approx 6 min.

“Films of this type were made first in France, notably by Méliès. Here any number of tricks and devices are used—stop motion photography, painted backgrounds, double exposure—in a picture remarkable successful in its time.”

The Navigator. 1924. USA. Directed by Donald Crisp, Buster Keaton. Written by Clyde Bruckman, Jean Havez, Joseph Mitchell. With Buster Keaton, Clarence Burton, Noble Johnson. **35mm.** Silent with musical accompaniment.

“The plot of *The Navigator* is particularly amusing in that it restates the problem of *Robinson Crusoe* with an inadvertent sign, so to speak; where Robinson Crusoe on a deserted island has to create the rudiments of civilization; Keaton, finding himself and his girl marooned in an over-technicalized environment, has to create the rudiments of natural existence...”

Mon, Dec 23, 1:30 T2

The Freshman. 1925. USA. Directed by Fred Newmeyer, Sam Taylor. Written by John Grey, Sam Taylor, Tim Whelan, Ted Wilde. With Harold Lloyd, Jobyna Ralston, Pat Harmon. 35mm Silent with musical accompaniment. Approx. 75 min.

“It was after he assumed horn-rimmed glasses in 1917 that Harold Lloyd developed his own ingenuous type of character-comedy, first in a number of one and two reel films and then in the full-length *Grandma’s Boy* and *Safety Last*. The Lloyd character, a typical American country boy, always struggles

eagerly to adapt himself to the circumstances more complex and more sophisticated than are natural to him. In *The Freshman*, the Lloyd motif is worked out with especial perfection, and its satire on undergraduate ambition remains as fresh as it is good natured."

Tue, Dec 24, 1:30 T2

Christmas Day CLOSED

Wed, Dec 25

Dressed to Kill. 1928. USA. Directed by Irving Cummings. Written by Howard Estabrook. With Mary Astor, Edmund Lowe, Ben Bard. 35mm. Silent with musical accompaniment. Approx. 73 min.

In *Film Notes*, Iris Barry and her assistant Jay Leyda include *A Short Table for a Study of the Gangster Film 1926-34* containing a listing for the feature *Dressed to Kill*. The gangsters in this silent feature are so well dressed and concerned with their appearance, that they change out of their swell hats and coats into work clothes when they get down to felonious business. Once they crack a safe, or flee from a robbery, they put on their finery again and drive off in a shiny car. The gang is suspicious of Jean who falls for their leader as she doesn't seem like the kind of girl that would swoon for a hood.

Thu, Dec 26, 1:30 T2

She Done Him Wrong. 1933. USA. Directed by Lowell Sherman. Written by John Bright, Harvey Thew, Mae West. Based on the play *Diamond Lil* by Mae West. With Mae West, Cary Grant, Gilbert Roland. 35mm. 65 min.

Noted in *A Short Table for a Study of the Gangster Film 1926-34* by Barry and Leyda, *She Done Him Wrong* is listed by the duo as among key films of the genre for the year 1933. Mae West is a bawdy dance hall singer named Lady Lou who loves a gangster and a teetotaler with the same unabashed lustiness. While her stage persona is sometimes vulgar and extreme, she really does have a heart of gold. The pious Captain Cummings played by Cary Grant is a charming foil for West's bluster.

Fri, Dec 27, 1:30 T2

Transatlantic. 1931. USA. Directed by William K. Howard. Written by Guy Bolton. With Jean Hersholt, Edmund Lowe, Myrna Loy. 35mm. Preserved with the support of The Film Foundation and the George Lucas Family Foundation. 74 min.

"Although the gangster film compelled the American public's attention during the period between 1930 and 1933 to the exclusion of most other film subjects, the gangster as protagonist and crime as business were not new to film history. The gangster cycle provided one subject which was contemporary, urgent

and real, and by using it the movies made themselves lively as the headlines of the newspapers; they gave the impression of being about to tackle real problems in American life.”

Tue, Dec 31, 1:30 T2