

The Museum of Modern Art

Silent Movie Week

August 2–8, 2023

The Roy and Niuta Titus Theaters

As a commercial medium, silent film lasted for only about 30 years, but those 30 years represented a creative explosion with few parallels in the art world. Evolving from one-shot experiments into immensely complex formal systems in record time, movies captured the energy of an emerging industrial society in all of its beauty and horror. Without the benefit of spoken words, silent films developed a system of expression based on light and movement that led down new creative paths. And by drawing on the spectator's imagination to complete their partial worlds, by filling in vocal nuance and ambient sounds, they solicit our attention and involvement in a unique way: to watch a silent film is to participate in its creation.

It's estimated that only 20 percent of the films made between 1895 and 1930 survive, and yet the work of preserving and restoring the remaining films continues. MoMA is one of several archives around the world with significant silent film holdings, and this program is an attempt to catch up with some of the work being done by our colleagues and ourselves, all presented here in East Coast—and in some cases United States—premieres.

Organized by Dave Kehr, Curator, Department of Film, The Museum of Modern Art.

SCREENING SCHEDULE

The Adventurer. 1917. USA. Directed by Charles Chaplin. Screenplay by Vincent Bryan, Maverick Terrell, Chaplin. With Chaplin, Edna Purviance, Eric Campbell, Henry Bergman, Albert Austin. Digital restoration by The Museum of Modern Art, with funding provided by The Lillian Gish Fund for Film Preservation. 26 min. MoMA's new restoration of *The Adventurer*, the final and, for many, finest of the 12 two-reelers Charles Chaplin made for Mutual, comes as a revelation. Assembled from seven different sources, almost all from the domestic A negative, often combining elements within a given shot, the MoMA restoration has a clarity and grain structure missing from the film for generations, and it has been fitted with remade intertitles that match samples from original prints of other Mutual films. The film now looks—almost uncannily—very much as it did when it first appeared on American screens.

What Happened to Jones. 1926. USA. Directed by William A. Seiter. Screenplay by Melville W. Brown, from a play by George Broadhurst. With Reginald Denny, Marian Nixon, Otis Harlan, Zasu Pitts. Digital restoration by Universal Pictures, from a nitrate print held by The Museum of Modern Art. 70 min. Organ accompaniment by Ben Model. George Broadhurst's 1897 Broadway farce had already been filmed twice before when Universal acquired it as a vehicle for Reginald Denny, a hale, open-faced Britisher who had become a star in silent films playing all-American strivers. Under the extremely precise direction of William A. Seiter, the film becomes a sort of Roaring '20s *After Hours*, when Denny decides to slip away on the eve of his wedding (to the radiant Marian Nixon) for a final boys-night-out poker game. A police raid sends Denny and his unfortunate sidekick (the great character actor Otis Harlan) on a rooftop chase, where the only escape is through a Turkish bath where a ladies' night is in progress. Seiter's work is a master class on using framing and cutting to enhance physical humor; the filmmaking here is at once highly sophisticated and almost completely

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invisible, so closely and naturally does it guide the spectator's focus of attention. *What Happened to Jones* is a forgotten gem.

August 4, 7:00 PM, T2

The Lady. 1925. USA. Directed by Frank Borzage. Screenplay by Frances Marion, from a play by Martin Brown. With Norma Talmadge, Wallace MacDonald, Marc MacDermott. Digital restoration by Library of Congress, National Audio-Visual Conservation Center and the Cohen Collection. 85 min. Piano accompaniment by Makia Matsumura. One of the top stars of the silent era (and the likely model for *Sunset Boulevard's* Norma Desmond), Norma Talmadge is almost forgotten today, largely because the films she made for her own production company have remained unrestored and unavailable. But thanks to a new effort from the Cohen Film Collection and the Library of Congress, Talmadge's films are coming back into circulation—and there is no better place to start than with this sumptuous melodrama directed by master-of-the-form Frank Borzage and written by Frances Marion.

August 3, 7:00 PM, T2

Stella Dallas. 1925. USA. Directed by Henry King. Screenplay by Frances Marion, from a novel by Olive Higgins Prouty. With Belle Bennett, Ronald Colman, Alice Joyce, Jean Hersholt, Lois Moran, Douglas Fairbanks Jr. Digital restoration by The Museum of Modern Art and the Film Foundation, from a 35mm print held by MoMA. 110 min. Accompanied by a new orchestral score composed by Stephen Horne and recorded at the film's 2021 restoration premiere at the Venice Biennale. Stella Dallas, the working-class mother who makes the ultimate sacrifice for her socially ambitious daughter, became one of the most resonant figures in American culture from the moment Olive Higgins Prouty's novel appeared in 1923. A stage adaptation soon followed, as did this film version in 1925 (the first of three). Produced by Samuel Goldwyn and directed by Henry King, the film is a powerful indictment of the rigid class barriers then emerging in the prosperous, postwar America of the 1920s, but the emotional center of the film is Stella (a brilliant portrayal by Belle Bennett, one of 73 actresses tested for the role), who marries "above her station" (to a temporarily embarrassed banker's son) but is unable to adapt her dress and behavior to the bourgeois standards of her new husband. When her daughter becomes engaged to a fashionable country-clubber, Stella's dilemma becomes painfully clear: Only by leaving her life can she ensure her daughter's happiness.

August 2, 8:00 PM, Sculpture Garden

La Dixième Symphonie (The Tenth Symphony). 1918. France. Directed and written by Abel Gance. With Séverin-Mars, Jean Toulout, Emmy Lynn. Digital restoration by La Cinemathèque Française. 94 min. Piano accompaniment by Donald Sosin. This 1918 feature by Abel Gance was made right before his international breakthrough with *J'accuse* and remains overshadowed by his epic accomplishments of the 1920s, *La Roue* (1923) and *Napoleon* (1927), though most of the elements of his mature style are present, from the extravagant stylistic experimentation (including an anticipation of the widescreen framing of *Napoleon*) to the unbridled grandiosity shared by protagonist and filmmaker. Séverin-Mars, the agonized engineer of *La Roue*, here plays a celebrated composer who is driven to write his masterpiece—on the theme of "Women's Betrayal"—when he comes falsely to believe that his wife has been unfaithful. The true situation is far more bizarre, involving a typically tortured Gance family romance.

August 5, 4:00 PM, T2

Three Weeks. 1924. USA. Directed by Alan Crosland. Screenplay by Elinor Glyn. With Aileen Pringle, Conrad Nagel, Stuart Holmes, Dale Fuller. Digital restoration by La Cineteca del

Friuli, from a print in the collection of Gosfilmofond. 103 min. Piano accompaniment by Makia Matsumura. Elinor Glyn's steamy 1907 novel *Three Weeks* was among the most censored, banned, and, inevitably, parodied works of the early 20th century. The breathless tale of a young, naive British aristocrat who learns about life and love while sharing a tiger skin rug with a mysterious, sensual older woman—actually the queen of an unnamed Baltic country, traveling incognito—had already been filmed twice before Samuel Goldwyn produced this lavish, now-definitive version, starring Aileen Pringle as the queen and Conrad Nagel as her boy toy. The real stars are art director Cedric Gibbons and costume designer Sophie Wachner, who cast an elegant, art nouveau aura over the extravagant goings-on. Long believed lost, the film was discovered in the vaults of Russia's Gosfilmofond and was recently restored by the Cineteca del Friuli.

August 6, 4:00 PM, T2

The Street of Forgotten Men. 1925. USA. Directed by Herbert Brenon. Screenplay by Paul Schofield, John Russell. With Percy Marmont, Mary Brian, Neil Hamilton, Louise Brooks. Restored by the San Francisco Silent Film Festival, from a print held by the Library of Congress. 76 min. Piano accompaniment by Donald Sosin. Herbert Brenon's 1925 urban melodrama holds its place in film history as the first screen appearance of Louise Brooks, unbilled but unmistakable as a gangster's moll whose sudden appearance enlivens the film's final reel. Brenon, one of the most acclaimed directors of the '20s (*Beau Geste*, *A Kiss for Cinderella*) here works with material that might have been written for Lon Chaney and Tod Browning: Easy Money Charley (Percy Marmont) makes a solid living posing as a one-armed amputee begging along the Bowery, but his heart of gold is awakened when a dying prostitute asks him to look after her young daughter—who quickly grows into beautiful Mary Brian, causing problems for everyone involved. The film was shot largely at Paramount's Astoria studios, with a couple of side trips to Fifth Avenue.

August 7, 7:00 PM, T2

Padlocked. 1926. USA. Directed by Allan Dwan. Screenplay by Rex Beach, Becky Gardiner, James Shelley Hamilton. With Lois Moran, Noah Beery Sr., Louise Dresser, Richard Arlen. Restored by the San Francisco Silent Film Festival, from a print held by the National Film Archive of the Czech Republic. Piano accompaniment by Ben Model. Lois Moran is largely remembered for having a brief affair with F. Scott Fitzgerald and inspiring the character of Rosemary Hoyt in *Tender Is the Night*, but as her films of the 1920s are rediscovered, she has come into focus as a particularly fresh, natural performer, whose easy, unaffected manner suggests the stars of the 1930s more than contemporaries like Norma Talmadge and Gloria Swanson. After her film debut in *Stella Dallas* (also screening in this series), Moran appeared in a few films at Paramount's Astoria studios, including this 1926 melodrama directed with great formal skill by Allan Dwan, who here beautifully exploits the moving-camera techniques he played a large part in inventing, with the sublime collaboration of cinematographer James Wong Howe. Like many films of the flapper era, *Padlocked* is an explicitly feminist story of personal liberation, with Moran as the dutiful daughter of a massively repressive Wall Street patriarch (Noah Beery); her escape route leads her into the clutches of a disturbingly Epsteinesque playboy and his female recruiter.

August 8, 7:00 PM, T2

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