



PORDENONE SILENT FILM FESTIVAL 2024 – 43rd EDITION

OPENING AND CLOSING NIGHTS WITH WESTERNS BY JOHN FORD AND HENRY KING
WITH ORCHESTRAL ACCOMPANIMENT

A CELEBRATION OF THE CHINESE-AMERICAN STAR ANNA MAY WONG WITH FOUR OF
HER FILMS
AND OF GIACOMO PUCCINI WITH *LA BOHÈME* BY KING VIDOR

MAJOR RETROSPECTIVES OF CINEMA FROM LATIN AMERICA, UZBEKISTAN AND THE
FILMS OF BEN CARRÉ

CLASSICS BY DREYER, LUBITSCH, DEMILLE AND MANY OTHER GREAT DIRECTORS

At the Teatro Verdi in Pordenone from 5th to 12th October

Pre-opening event on 4th October in Sacile and repeat of the concluding event at the Teatro
Verdi on 13th October

Press Release

Our celebration of **Silent Cinema** returns once again to Pordenone, starting, as every year, on the first Saturday of October. An unmissable event for film lovers, from 5th to 12th October the Teatro Verdi welcomes viewers to recapture the magic of films from the first decades of the last century, with restored copies from film archives around the world. The charm and appeal of the festival, directed by **Jay Weissberg**, is further enhanced by live musical accompaniment for all films, performed by individual pianists, small groups of musicians and, for the opening and closing events, a full orchestra. Thanks to our collaboration with **MYmovies**, the Giornate will again be streamed with a selection of films accompanied by the festival pianists.

SPECIAL EVENTS

As is tradition, the pre-opening event, on Friday 4th October, is held in Sacile, in a show of gratitude for the hospitality given by this city during the years when the festival had to leave Pordenone due to the restoration of the Teatro Verdi. The film chosen for this year's screening at the Teatro Zancanaro, which will be repeated at the Teatro Verdi in Pordenone on Thursday 10th October, is the 1924 comedy ***Girl Shy*** starring **Harold Lloyd** and directed by **Fred Newmeyer and Sam Taylor**. The film will be shown with a new musical accompaniment composed by the young Dutch musician **Daan van den Hurk** and performed by the Pordenone-based **Zerorchestra**. In the 1920s Harold Lloyd was one of Hollywood's most popular stars and, the perfect embodiment of the virtuous and optimistic American spirit of the time. He was awarded an Oscar for his career in 1953, not just for his uncontrovertible status as master comedian but also for being a good citizen.

The main events, which open and close the 43rd edition of the Festival, focus on the Western, one of the most iconic cinematic and cultural genres of the United States in the twentieth century. And if we want to see classics of the genre, then no one made them better than **John Ford**, the director of ***3 Bad Men***, his last silent western, filmed in 1926. This is one of the earliest films to reveal a distinctive trope of Ford's work: his compassion for outsiders, in this case the three eponymous Bad Men, who are revealed to possess such a powerful sense of honour that they're prepared to sacrifice their lives for it. For ***3 Bad Men***, which will be shown on Saturday 5th October at the Teatro Verdi in

Pordenone, **Timothy Brock** will conduct the **Orchestra da Camera di Pordenone** in a performance of his own score.

The Western selected for the closing event, on Saturday 12th October (and repeated in the afternoon on Sunday 13th) is ***The Winning of Barbara Worth*** (1926) directed by **Henry King**, featuring **Gary Cooper** in his first major role alongside protagonists **Vilma Bánky** and **Ronald Colman**. The film introduced a number of notable innovations, including the use of a new panchromatic film by the director of photography George Barnes and his assistant Gregg Toland (later the cinematographer on *Citizen Kane* and the special effects by **Ned Mann**, which will be discussed in the **Jonathan Dennis Memorial Lecture** by **Craig Barron**, Oscar winner in 2009 for the special effects in David Fincher's film *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*. For the screening of *The Winning of Barbara Worth*, the Festival has commissioned **Neil Brand** to write a new musical score that will be performed by the Orchestra da Camera di Pordenone conducted by **Ben Palmer**.

The musical event on Wednesday 9th October is the French film ***La sultane de l'amour*** (1919), directed by **Charles Burguet** and **René Le Somptier**, presented with a special accompaniment. The film is a response by a reinvigorated French film industry to the overwhelming power of American cinema. It was a great success for its spectacular quality and artistic merits with a remarkable evocation of the orientalist setting from *The Arabian Nights*. Its widespread positive reception led to the film being newly distributed in 1923 in a slightly shorter and entirely stencil-coloured version.

THE RETROSPECTIVES

The festival focusses not only on American and European cinema but also on productions from countries whose cinematic heritage is less known but by no means less interesting. Quite the opposite: exploring countries that are often overlooked by a Western perspective makes it possible to get in touch with cultures, customs and world views that would otherwise remain distant and alien. This year the festival turns the spotlight on **Uzbekistan** and **Latin America**. The programme focussing on Latin America is curated by Paolo Tosini and includes 25 titles from 16 archives from 10 countries: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru, Paraguay and Uruguay. It includes a varied selection of films (fiction feature films, short films, home movies, documentaries and newsreels) documenting the different stages of development of the film industry in the various countries. These countries had varied levels of exposure to Western influence (Argentina and Brazil, for example, welcomed millions of immigrants, including many from Italy). The retrospective offers an opportunity to appreciate how this influenced the cultural expressions of the different countries, and which countries managed to preserve more specifically local characteristics.

The programme on cinema from Uzbekistan, organised with the **National Film Fund of Uzbekistan**, in collaboration with the **Uzbekistan Art and Culture Development Foundation**, shines a light on the contrast between a society anchored to customs and centuries-long religious traditions and the determination of the Soviet regime to wipe out everything that was considered reactionary and an obstacle to the construction of the new social order. While the first film produced by the Bukharan People's Soviet Republic, *The Minaret of Death*, included in the programme, was an action film steeped in exoticism, the Soviet regime soon imposed a choice of different themes, more in line with the dictates of socialist ideology. The selection of films reflects the contradictions of a country poised between past and present, of a cinematography that had to rely on the advanced structures and techniques of Soviet cinema but could not ignore the public's taste for tales and legends related to the history of the country. The festival's retrospective, with rare images of the last Khan of Khiva also serves as a witness to cinema's arrival in Uzbekistan before the annexation to the Soviet Union: reportedly the first screenings took place in Tashkent a few weeks after the one in Paris by the Lumière brothers.

Another highlight of the 2024 edition is the **tribute to Giacomo Puccini**, on the centenary of his death, with the screening of the 1926 ***La Bohème*** by **King Vidor** featuring a moving performance by Lillian Gish as Mimì. As well as starring in the film, the actress was also at the heart of its production

– her contract gave her final say over all artistic decisions, starting with the choice of the director and the male performer, with Rodolfo played by **John Gilbert**. The production design for this *Bohème* was by Arnold Gillespie and Cedric Gibbons, but Ben Carré also collaborated – albeit uncredited – and this brings us to another section of the programme: the part of the festival dedicated to **Ben Carré**, curated by **Thomas A. Walsh** (winner of an Emmy Award in 1999 for art direction of the series *Buddy Faro* and nominated in 2005 and 2006 for *Desperate Housewives*). This section includes a dozen films and covers a period of time from 1908 to 1928 including films by Carré made with Gaumont directed by Louis Feuillade (*Le Huguenot*, 1909) and Étienne Arnaud (*La mort de Mozart*, 1909), and the American period with many important directors, most significantly Maurice Tourneur, who had also arrived from France, and with whom Carré formed a close artistic partnership. Two of the films Carré made with Tourneur, the rarely screened *Trilby* from 1915 and *The Blue Bird* from 1918, are also included in the programme.

Among the great names of cinema, **Anna May Wong**, the first Chinese-American star in Hollywood, is another outstanding personality in the festival programme. In the American cinema of the time, Asians, black people, Native Americans and Latinos were relegated to marginal, often negative roles, and Wong had to fight hard to establish herself, often receiving less than her charm and skill deserved. From the end of the nineteen-twenties, her career was divided for a decade between Europe (France and Germany) and the United States, continuing in sound cinema (her last film appearance was in 1960 and she also appeared on television during the fifties). The festival will screen two films from the American period, *Dinty* from 1920 (again with designs by Ben Carré) and *Driven from Home* from 1927, as well as two Anglo-German productions, *Song* from 1928 and *Pavement Butterfly* from 1929, both directed by Richard Eichberg. Ignored for too long after her death in 1961 at the age of 56, Anna May Wong has finally become not only an icon of style and talent, but also a symbol of the fight against racial and gender stereotypes around the world. In recent years she's entered popular culture with a collectable Barbie in her likeness, and her face is now featured on over 300 million quarter-dollar coins: a deserved, albeit belated, recognition of her status as a truly great American actress.

A number of great masters are featured among the classics in the Canon Revisited section. Like the Danish **Carl Theodor Dreyer** with *Leaves from Satan's Book* from 1921. This was his second directorial work and is an extremely ambitious and expensive production divided into four chapters corresponding to four historical periods (Jerusalem at the time of Jesus, Spain at the time of the Inquisition, the French Revolution, the Soviet invasion of Finland) wherein Dreyer identifies the presence of the Devil in human history. Often compared to Griffith's *Intolerance* especially in terms of editing, Dreyer's film bears witness to the director's great artistic skill and expressive power.

The 1924 *Three Women* is a return to the great comedy of **Ernst Lubitsch** with a formidable trio of actresses: **Pauline Frederick**, **May McAvoy** and **Marie Prevost**. Remaining in the field of comedy, we find another master of Hollywood whose name is generally associated with huge blockbusters: **Cecil B. DeMille**, with the 1915 film *Chimmie Fadden Out West*. The film takes up the story of a plucky Irish immigrant who achieved great success at the New York *Sun* at the end of the nineteenth century (the story was later published in a book), and is a sequel to another film, also by DeMille, of which only a few fragments remain today.

The other films in the Canon include *Raskolnikov* (1923), an adaptation of *Crime and Punishment* by the German director **Robert Wiene** which reinterprets Dostoevsky's novel in an expressionist key. The original score for the film is by Richard Siedhoff, who will perform it on piano, live in Pordenone.

Sorok Pervyi (The Forty-First, USSR 1926) brings our focus back to the work of **Yakov Protazanov**, a direct link between the pre-revolutionary period and the Soviet era. And finally Italian cinema, which is represented in the Canon by *Rapsodia satanica* (Satan's Rhapsody), shot in 1915 but released in theatres in 1917 due to Italy's entry into war. The film by **Nino Oxilia** belongs to the genre of art cinema, a meeting point between poetry, plastic arts and music. *Rapsodia satanica* has also gone down in history for the performance by **Lyda Borelli** who brings to life an ideal of femininity inspired by Art Nouveau and D'Annunzio.

Among many welcome returns, it's worth mentioning the evening of Friday 11th October, dedicated to the Czech actress **Anny Ondra**, famed for her appearance in two Hitchcock films, including the silent film, *The Manxman*, which brought the festival to its successful conclusion two years ago. In 1928, the year before the Hitchcock film, Ondra was the protagonist in ***Saxophon-Susi*** – presented this year in the Rediscoveries and Restorations section – where she was directed by Carl Lamač, husband and mentor, with whom she had a long artistic relationship that continued even after their divorce.

Women are at the heart of the programme of 28 feminist fragments, divided into 3 sections, with images of intimate female life, joy, play, fun and rebellion from archives around the world, including India and Thailand.

As we've seen several times in previous editions of the festival, watching images from the past often triggers unexpected connections to the present, and we find surprising analogies between then and now in the themes and stories told in silent cinema. This is certainly the case with the film ***The Land of Promise***, from 1924, which inevitably takes us to the tragedy underway in the Middle East. The director is **Ya'acov Ben Dov**, born in Ukraine, who emigrated to Palestine in 1907 and became a champion of the Zionist movement advocating for a homeland for the Jewish people. Thanks to the exceptional restoration by the Prague archive, that enhances the visual beauty of the film with the captivating tinting colours reproduced from the original nitrate copy at the Jewish Museum in Prague, we're able to appreciate Ben Dov's artistic merits but also consider how the film fills the movement's propagandistic needs.

The Cineteca del Friuli, co-organiser with Cinemazero of the Silent Film Festival, has curated the restoration of ***The Perl [sic] of the Ruins*** presented here for the first time. This is a short film from 1921, probably commissioned by **Lloyd Triestino** for promotional purposes. The film's interest lies in its setting, the buildings, roads and squares of Trieste, and the shipyards and vessels of the shipping company, allowing us to push aside what's really a rather insignificant story and instead focus on the documentary aspects. The restoration was carried out in collaboration with the Archivio Vitrotti.

From Trieste we move to the very south of Italy, to **Sicily**, with a selection curated by Elena Beltrami from the Cineteca del Friuli and Gabriele Perrone from the Museo del Cinema di Torino that inaugurates a multi-year project dedicated to the Italian *Regioni*. Thanks to the collaboration of other Italian, European and South American archives, the curators have created a broad programme "drawing from life" and divided by themes: landscape; arts, crafts and current affairs; volcanos, earthquakes and storms (significantly, Luca Comerio's historic footage just days after the Messina earthquake of 1908). The section is completed by a single fiction film, a rarely screened French production, ***L'appel du sang*** (*The Call of the Blood*, 1919) directed by Louis Mercanton, set in Taormina and starring the great actor Ivor Novello, who made his cinema debut with this film.

The section **The Origins of Cinema** offers the opportunity to retrace the early films of **D.W. Griffith**, finally available in high quality copies. In 1908 Griffith was at Biograph, where he worked for five years. Thanks to the Library of Congress' Biograph project, which has gone back to the surviving paper prints to give them new life after decades of not being available at all or only in battered 16mm copies, these new restorations allow us to reassess Griffith's position at the innovative studio. In these early short films Griffith directs a cast of stock characters and even occasionally appears himself alongside future powerhouses like Mack Sennett; it's amusing to remember that his most famous collaborator, director of photography Billy Bitzer, wrote that, judging by how he had seen him act, he would never have thought he would become so important.

This treasure trove of silent cinema truly seems to have no end. The section on **Swedish nature and ethnographic documentaries** includes the ornithology films by **Bengt Berg**, a well-known figure – respected for his scientific rigour – but controversial for his sympathy towards Nazi Germany. The 1920s saw the success of the ethnographic films by **Erik Bergström** and the cameraman **Gustaf Boge** about the indigenous Sami people and their struggle in a harsh environment. Their

films bring to mind the images by the more famous Robert Flaherty, widely considered to be the father of documentary filmmaking.

The EYE Filmmuseum's programme exploring **Studio Joris Ivens and the Centre for Film Technique** presents eight short films made between 1929 and 1934 with the aim of promoting cinematographic art in its purest and most autonomous form, in contrast to Hollywood-style commercial cinema. In the early thirties, the Centre, founded in 1927 in Amsterdam as a film club by Ivens and a group of artists and intellectuals, quickly became the headquarters of the Dutch avant-garde, but by around 1935 it was already starting to break apart, due in part to the increasingly frequent periods that Ivens spent abroad. Many of the veterans of that experience, however, continued to pursue important educational work, helping to train young filmmakers.

Legend has it that in the early editions of the festival, some cineastes would recognise actors and actresses by saying their names out loud as they appeared on the screen. Knowing that Pordenone will bring together a great concentration of historians and archivists, this year's festival is launching a new section in collaboration with EYE entitled "**Sine nomine**": 14 short films and fragments will be screened, each with its own reference number from six film libraries, in the hope that they can be identified. There are no prizes for any winners, but what could be most rewarding for a cinephile than being the one to identify a movie?

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