



42^a EDITION OF THE PORDENONE SILENT FILM FESTIVAL At the Teatro Verdi in Pordenone from 7 to 14 October 2023

Dedicated to Russell Merritt

Press release

From 7-14 October 2023 the **Pordenone Silent Film Festival** returns to the Teatro Verdi in Pordenone, where cinema from a century ago takes on new life in all its original splendor thanks to beautiful restorations and live musical accompaniments that act as a bridge between images of the past and audiences of today. The program of this 42nd edition, assembled by festival director **Jay Weissberg**, is once again replete with rediscoveries and innovative combinations of themes, films and genres with clear links to contemporary talking points.

In addition to special events, such as orchestral evenings and numerous retrospectives, the week is further enlivened by daily Collegium sessions, book and DVD presentations, Masterclasses with the musicians, lectures, meetings and the FilmFair, where books, film-related collectibles, Blu-ray and DVD sets and festival memorabilia can be purchased.

For those unable to attend in person, whether longtime silent film lovers or those just discovering these riches, we're once again offering the possibility of watching a selection of films and presentations through our streaming platform hosted by MyMovies.

SPECIAL EVENTS

For our traditional pre-opening evening at the Teatro Zancanaro in Sacile, this year held on Friday, 6 October, the musicians of the **Zerorchestra** will perform Juri Dal Dan's new score, inspired by the Roaring Twenties, for **Poker Faces** (1926), directed by Harry A. Pollard and starring Edward Everett Horton and Laura La Plante. It's a delightful American comedy brimming with amusing misunderstandings, funny deceptions and unexpected twists.

The festival's official opening takes place on Saturday, 7 October in the Teatro Verdi of Pordenone, with a screening of **La Divine Croisière** (1929), one of Julien Duvivier's last silents, presented with a score composed and conducted by **Antonio Coppola** and performed by the **Octeur de France**. Long available only in a severely mutilated version, this striking film largely set aboard a merchant ship has undergone a painstaking reconstruction by Lobster Films of Paris, who have brought back the director's original vision with its biting social and class critique.

This year's mid-week event, on Wednesday, 11 October is the British feature **Hindle Wakes** (1927) directed by **Maurice Elvey**. Lauded by film historians for its proto-feminist tone, this remarkably "modern" story foregrounds the notion that women as much as men – including those from the working classes – can indulge in life's small adventures without then being forced into the straightjacket of social conventions. Shot on location in parts of Lancashire and Yorkshire, the film has been scored by **Maud Nelissen**, who accompanies with four other musicians.

For the closing event on Saturday, 14 October (and repeated on Sunday the 15th), we're going all out, in silent film terms, with **Charlie Chaplin** and **Buster Keaton**. The screening kicks off with Chaplin and his 1923 mid-length film **The Pilgrim**, in a new restoration commissioned by the Chaplin Office that's world premiering in Pordenone. Here the beloved star plays an escaped convict who grabs the first outfit he can find after breaking free; it just happens to be that of an Evangelical minister, leading to all sorts of expectedly hilarious consequences. The original score composed by

Chaplin and arranged by Timothy Brock will be performed by the **Orchestra da Camera di Pordenone**, conducted by **Ben Palmer**.

Making the evening even more unforgettable is the combination of *The Pilgrim* with Buster Keaton's masterpiece, ***Sherlock Jr.***, produced the following year and considered one of the greatest comedies of all time. Acknowledged as the summit of Keaton's artistry, the film has him playing a projectionist who dreams of becoming a great detective, allowing the star/director to experiment with the advanced cinematic language of the day yet with virtually no special effects, based simply on Keaton's phenomenal physical gifts acquired and developed from his childhood in vaudeville. Incredibly, the film has never been presented in Pordenone, where it arrives this year in a new restoration by Lobster Films, with the world premiere of a new score by Daan van den Hurk, also performed by the Orchestra da Camera di Pordenone conducted by Ben Palmer.

In addition to the special events, we'd like to point out one of the three important discoveries from the **Národní filmový archiv** in Prague which will have its premiere at the Giornate: ***Circe the Enchantress*** (1924) by Robert Z. Leonard, with the Hollywood star **Mae Murray** playing a scintillating Jazz Age seductress.

THE RETROSPECTIVES

Leading this year's retrospectives is the second and final part of **Ruritania**, dedicated to the stories of kings, queens, princes and princesses from fictitious Balkan kingdoms that captured the imagination of international audiences. Fueled by the headlines of the day – the Balkan Wars and especially World War I – and by often turbulent dynastic events as well as larger-than-life personalities who understood the value of personal propaganda, the popular Western conception of Europe east of Vienna was of a primitive place brimming with violence and sensuality, an exotic land of strange and extravagant customs where figures like **Queen Marie of Romania** and **King Zog of Albania** (both of whom are seen in newsreels this year) seemed to step straight out of an operetta. This year's films include melodramas, swashbuckling stories, romantic comedies and burlesques, produced in Spain, France, Germany, and the United States, all screened with newsreels of the real royal families of the Balkans.

Also in a second incarnation is the series curated by Ulrich Rüdel e Steve Massa on the origins of **Slapstick**, specifically looking at the links between European and American comics. Divided into 5 themed sections (chase films, clowns, drag, mismatched pairs, married couples), each program consists of shorts and a feature, showcasing such well known comics as Harold Lloyd and Mabel Normand from the U.S., Walter Forde from the UK, and the most famous clowns of the early 20th century, the Fratellini Brothers from France, seen in a recreation of their influential circus act. Also included is the Danish duo Pat and Patachon, modelled in some ways after Don Quixote and Sancho Panza and precursors to other famed comic pairings.

In 2021, the festival helped to rediscover Ellen Richter, and in this edition we spotlight another German cinema personality who once was one of the most popular performers in the world: the director, screenwriter, producer and actor **Harry Piel**, sometimes referred to as the German Douglas Fairbanks. Active from the early 1910s through the sound era, Piel was known for films brimming with action and adventure (hence our subtitle, "Daredevil Director"), amazing audiences with spectacular feats and the use of what was then cutting-edge technology: his 1916 *Die Grosse Wette* is considered the first film to feature a robot. Distributors knew that when Harry Piel's name was attached, it guaranteed box office success, attracting audiences primed for his special blend of spectacle and charm.

Piel easily made the transition from silent to sound film, but his adherence to the National Socialist Party in 1933 significantly damaged his later reputation. In fact, after the end of the war he was banned for several years and his last attempt to return to the scene, in 1953, was a fiasco. He died in poverty in Munich in 1963 and his work unjustly fell into oblivion. Now, 60 years later, Andreas Thein at the Filmmuseum Düsseldorf has brought this much-anticipated series to Pordenone, in an

eight-title retrospective boasting world premiere restorations. Especially worth singling out is *Sein Größter Bluff* from 1927, notable for the presence of Marlene Dietrich in one of her biggest roles to date.

Harry Carey, together with William S. Hart and Tom Mix, shared the pantheon of cowboy stars, but Carey was the favorite of John Ford, who called him the "bright star of the early Western sky." The actor came late to cinema, but he was lucky enough to be taken under wing by two giants, D. W. Griffith and Ford, with whom he made a very successful western series, often playing the character of Cheyenne Harry. Carey made a smooth transition from silents to talkies, receiving an Oscar nomination for best supporting actor for Frank Capra's *Mr Smith Goes to Washington* and long maintaining his status as a beloved actor in such classics as Howard Hawks' *Red River*, alongside John Wayne and his son Harry Carey Jr. The Giornate series consists of five films including Ford's *Hell Bent* from 1918 and another discovery in the Prague archive, *The Fox* (1921).

A further tribute this year is to the renowned artist and textile designer **Sonia Delaunay**, to whom an exhibition will be dedicated next year at the Bard Graduate Center in New York. Born in Odessa, she studied painting in Russia and Germany before moving to France, where together with her husband Robert Delaunay and other artists she founded the Orphism movement, characterized by dynamic compositions of geometric shapes and contrasting colors. In Paris and Madrid she extended her activity to costume creations, textiles and fashion. Between 1925 and 1929, Delaunay also collaborated on various film projects including the "fashionable film" *L'Élégance* presented in the Giornate program together with other shorts testifying to her significant influence on Paris' avant-garde scene in the 1920s.

The **Canon Revisited**, curated by Paolo Cherchi Usai, holds a number of surprises, including the new restoration - once again by Lobster - of *Merry-Go-Round* (1923) the legendary film begun by **Erich von Stroheim** and finished by Rupert Julian (who replaced Stroheim during production). Also showing this year is **Louis Feuillade's Vendémiaire** (1918), in a stunning copy made expressly for the Giornate by Gaumont in Paris from an original nitrate print. *Hell's Heroes* directed by **William Wyler** is also in the Canon, a masterpiece of early realism made in both silent and sound versions during that transition year of 1929. Rounding out the section are *Ma l'amor mio non muore!* (1913) by Mario Caserini, with Lyda Borrelli and Mario Bonnard, and Karl Grune's German expressionist masterpiece *Die Straße* (1923), which inaugurates the "street film" genre.

2023 marks the centenary of the death of **Pierre Loti**, the influential writer who cut an extraordinary figure in the multiple worlds he inhabited. The Giornate pays homage to the man and his tastes in a 55-minute program that speaks to his wide-ranging interests, moving from France to the Arab world and Japan in a compilation of shorts from the Eye Filmmuseum in Amsterdam. Speaking of far-flung places, the Hans Berge collection from Norway takes us on a journey from London to Paris, from Tenerife to the Virgin Islands, from Trinidad to Australia.

Harlem Sketches (1935), directed by Leslie Bain, is a fascinating short discovered at the Cinémathèque de Toulouse, which had been championed by black intellectuals at the tail end of the Harlem Renaissance for the way it showed the reality of the African-American community in Harlem during the Great Depression. The recorded score was composed by George Antheil, who also wrote the music for Fernand Léger's *Ballet mécanique*, screening in the Sonia Delaunay section.

Another rarity this year is *La Madre* (1917) by Giuseppe Sterni, starring Italia Vitaliani, niece of Eleonora Duse and equally renowned for her adherence to a new style of naturalism on stage.

Sports enthusiasts take note! *Der Berg des Schicksals* (1924) will appeal to all who love Alpine majesty, whether as mountaineers or spectators. For those more interested in **football**, we're screening a remarkable film from 1923 showing Italy's oldest football club, from Genoa, in matches they played in Argentina and Uruguay. The footage housed at Home Movies in Bologna lasts twenty minutes and was shot in Montevideo and Buenos Aires, where football is now a religion.

In addition to the wealth of film screenings, all of course with live music, the festival plays host to two lectures. The **Jonathan Dennis Memorial Lecture** is this year delivered by author/historian/filmmaker **Mindy Johnson**, whose recent discovery of one of the pioneers of animation, **Bessie Mae Kelley**, is the subject of her talk, "'The Only Woman Animator – Bessie Mae Kelley & Women at the Dawn of an Industry.'" The following day, **Beth Werling**, Senior Collections Manager in the History Department at the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County, will deliver the 2nd annual lecture on costume design in silent cinema, entitled "Mary Pickford in 26 Costumes and 5 Golden Curls."

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Le Giornate del Cinema Muto – Press office

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