



THE 45TH PORDENONE SILENT FILM FESTIVAL

At the Teatro Verdi, Pordenone, from 3rd to 10th October

THE FESTIVAL OPENS WITH DOUGLAS FAIRBANKS IN *DON Q, SON OF ZORRO* AND CLOSES WITH JOHN FORD'S *THE IRON HORSE*

WEIMAR UNCENSORED AND THE ART OF THE BENSHI
AMONG THE MAIN RETROSPECTIVES

Press release

With over **250 titles**, **hailing from 19 countries** and hundreds of guests expected to arrive from around the world, Pordenone is once again preparing to become the international capital of silent film.

If we were to map out a guide to the extensive program put together by director **Jay Weissberg** for the **45th edition of the Giornate del Cinema Muto – Pordenone Silent Film Festival**, taking place at the Teatro Verdi from 3rd - 10th October, then there'd be no better place to start than the **special events**.

The opening gala of the 45th edition is **Douglas Fairbanks'** energetic 1925 swashbuckler ***Don Q, Son of Zorro***, directed by **Donald Crisp** and presented at the Teatro Verdi in a sparkling new restoration from the **Danske Filminstitut**. A truly unforgettable evening will be guaranteed thanks to a new orchestral score, composed and conducted by Maestro **Andrej Goričar**, commissioned by the **Slovenska Kinoteka**, a partner of the event. It will receive its world premiere performed by the RTV Slovenia Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Goričar himself.

For our closing screening, we're proud to bring back **John Ford's** monumental 1924 masterpiece ***The Iron Horse***, not seen at the festival since 1998. One of the key Westerns of the silent era, the film will be accompanied by the **Orchestra da Camera di Pordenone** performing **John Lanchbery's** score, conducted by Maestro **Ben Palmer**.

Alongside the orchestral events, there will be a **special mid-festival highlight**. On Wednesday 7th October we'll be screening the Japanese film ***Kurutta Ippēji*** (A Page of Madness; 1926) by **Teinosuke Kinugasa**, with piano accompaniment by **Makia Matsumura** and live narration by the *benshi* **Ichiro Kataoka**. This visually powerful experimental film forgoes intertitles, allowing its story - that of a man who takes a job as a caretaker at the mental asylum where his wife has been confined - to unfold through images alone. Through rhythmic, fast-paced editing, employing multiple exposures, lens distortions, and extreme camera angles, the boundary between sanity and madness, past and present, objective reality and hallucination systematically dissolves. *Kurutta Ippēji* is presented in a new restoration carried out by the **National Film Archive of Japan** with support from the **Yanai Initiative**, (a foundation set up with the global mission of promoting Japanese language, culture, and literature) who have restored it to its original quality and color. The film is part of the program **"The Art of the Benshi"**, which celebrates this unique art form of actor-narrators. This approach, which draws on the conventions of traditional Japanese theater, enriches the screening of the silent film with narration and commentary, giving voice to the main characters. Thanks to the partnership between the Yanai Initiative, the National Film Archive of Japan, and the

Giornate del Cinema Muto, this year will also feature the presentation of **Gorô Masamune kôshiden** (The Legend of the Filial Child Goro Masamune; 1915) – one of the few surviving titles by the important director **Jirô Yoshino** – and the beautiful **Taki no shiraito** (The Water Magician, 1933) by **Kenji Mizoguchi**. Both titles are amongst the first from a multi-year series of new restorations of Japanese silent films. The screenings will be accompanied by *benshi* **Ichiro Kataoka**, **Kumiko Omori**, and **Nanako Yamauchi**, and by three Japanese musicians.

The main retrospective, which will continue in 2027, is “**Weimar Uncensored: Taboos and Transgressions in 1919-1920**”, dedicated to cinema of the early years of the German Republic, when there was a veritable explosion of films centered on themes such as lust, prostitution, and addiction. In recent years, scholars **Anton Kaes** and **Michael Cowan** have devoted particular attention to this period, uncovering in the few surviving films an important testimony to a phase of German history that was especially turbulent from a cultural and social standpoint, when the devastation that followed the First World War led to a clash between unbridled permissiveness and growing repressive forces. Among the six feature films presented this year: **Heddas Rache** (1919, directed by Jaap Speyer), also known as “Die Tochter der Prostituierten; **Die Teufelskirche** (The Devil’s Church. A Thunderstorm Dream) by Hans Mierendorff, on satanism and female sexuality - a theme also central to **Genuine. Die Tragödie eines seltsamen Hauses** (Genuine. The Tragedy of a Strange House) by **Robert Wiene**, from 1920, starring a vamp(ire) thirsty for men’s blood. Believed lost for decades, **Genuine** has recently been reconstructed based on copies of a reworked French version. Another title of great interest is **Pest in Florenz** (Plague in Florence), from 1919, directed by **Otto Rippert** and written by **Fritz Lang**, who was twenty-nine at the time but had already endured the traumatic experience of war. Set in a Renaissance Florence meticulously reconstructed in a German studio, the film depicts a world in decline, marked by collapsing authority, eroding faith, and collective anxiety. It exposes the moral decay and corruption festering beneath the lavish appearance of the Florentine court.

Marshall Neilan’s name regularly pops up in the plethora of silent movie star autobiographies that exist. For **Mary Pickford** (Neilan was her favorite director), he was “one of the most delightful, aggravating, gifted and charming human beings I have ever known”. To **Colleen Moore**, he was “a charming, crazy, obstinate Irishman who lived a full and exciting life”. **Gloria Swanson** called him “the most bewitching man in Hollywood”. And yet, apart from the films he made with Pickford, Neilan has largely been overlooked by film history, remembered more for his weakness for drink than for his films. With the objective of highlighting his versatility as a director, we’ll be screening five features directed by Neilan, from the little-known 1916 Western **The Country That God Forgot** to the fun-filled 1927 comedy starring Colleen Moore, **Her Wild Oat**. Also included in the program is the world premiere of the new restoration of **M’liss**, a 1918 film starring Mary Pickford that Kevin Brownlow has described as “a film of unparalleled beauty”.

The second part of the biennial retrospective dedicated to one of the most celebrated Italian actresses of silent cinema, **Italia Almirante Manzini** (Taranto, 1890 – São Paulo, Brazil, 1941), holds surprises and exciting new discoveries in store. The most noteworthy of these is undoubtedly **L'arzigogolo** (1924) by **Mario Almirante**, scheduled for the evening of Monday 5th October. In this case, a new restoration was undertaken by the Museo Nazionale del Cinema in collaboration with the Cineteca del Friuli, following the discovery of a black-and-white print at the Cinemateca Brasileira and a beautiful, albeit incomplete, nitrate print in a Trieste collection recently acquired by the Cineteca del Friuli. Produced by Alba Film, this sumptuous Renaissance-set drama is drawn from Sem Benelli’s “farcical poem”. With exteriors shot in Turin’s Borgo Medievale and spectacular costumes designed by the legendary theater costume designer Caramba, this film is proof that Italian cinema could still compete with leading international productions. It is also the film with which Italia Almirante Manzini bid farewell to cinema audiences before embarking on the long theatrical tour that brought her back to the stage, first in Italy and later in South America.

Among the other titles featuring the Italian diva are ***La statua di carne*** (GB: From the Beyond) (1921), also by Mario Almirante, based on the drama-novel by Teobaldo Ciconi, and ***La maschera e il volto*** (1919), in which she resumed her collaboration with director **Augusto Genina** following *Femmina*. Adapted from the play of the same name by Luigi Chiarelli, it is one of the rare instances in which the actress took on, if not a comedy in the strict sense, a role characterized by a certain lightness and irony, a further testament to her versatility as a performer.

The Festival again draws attention closer to home with its continuing program featuring an Italian province. This year we focus on **Lazio**, showcasing stunning views as well as fiction films shot not only in the Eternal City but elsewhere in the province, including Ninfa, Rieti and Viterbo. Among the titles to look out for are ***Il romanzo di Maddalena*** (1913), in a beautiful new restoration by the Cinémathèque de Toulouse that preserves the film's original colors, and ***Villa Falconieri***, a 1928 German-Italian coproduction directed by **Richard Oswald** and starring **Maria Jacobini**.

Early Spanish cinema seldom enters the spotlight, but that's about to change with a four-slot series made up of more than **50 short films** shot in Spain between 1896 and 1919. Consisting of non-fiction and fiction, this groundbreaking series initiated by the **Filmoteca de Catalunya** and the **Filmoteca Española** represents a multi-year project bringing together 11 Spanish archives as well as institutions from other nations, all of whom looked into their holdings to preserve these precious survivors of the nation's rarely seen cinematic heritage. A monumental undertaking that represents the value of multi-archive collaboration, the program will be accompanied in two of the sessions by **Spanish musicians** to ensure a proper Iberian flavor.

Comedy is always an essential part of the Giornate, and this year we're exploring the origins of situation comedies on both sides of the Atlantic. **Mr. and Mrs. Sidney Drew** were celebrated for their humorous shorts, designed around the small misunderstandings between a husband and wife. Rejecting slapstick – Drew himself declared, “humorous action does not mean gross horseplay” – the pair were considered “polite comedians” who derived laughs from good stories rather than a string of funny incidents. Sidney (uncle to John, Lionel and Ethel Barrymore) died in 1919, but his style of comedy influenced generations to come. By presenting two programs of Drew shorts together with films by Swedish actor/producer/director **Pauline Brunius**, we'll have the opportunity to compare their work and judge whether the Drews, popular in Sweden, may have influenced Brunius, an important star in Scandinavia.

The Canon Revisited returns with classic films selected by Paolo Cherchi Usai. Among the six titles are ***Zhizn za zhizn*** (*A Life for a Life*), 1916, by pre-Revolutionary Russia's greatest director, **Evgenij Bauer**; **Victor Sjöström's** early masterpiece ***Berg-Ejvind och hans hustru*** (*The Outlaw and His Wife*) from 1918, and **George W. Hill's** ***Tell it to the Marines*** from 1926, starring the great **Lon Chaney** in a more humorous role than usual, and one of the few in which he doesn't appear in disfiguring makeup.

As usual, **Rediscoveries and Restorations** offers a treasure chest of riches, spanning genres, countries and time periods. Among this year's new restorations are two titles starring **Gloria Swanson**, both courtesy of Dennis Doros and Milestone Films: ***The Humming Bird*** (directed by Sidney Olcott, 1924), and ***Sadie Thompson*** from 1928, one of Raoul Walsh's most important films of the period, in which Swanson plays the role of a prostitute on a South Sea Island who clashes with a hypocritical reformer, played by **Lionel Barrymore**. Based on a short story by **W. Somerset Maugham**, the film, one of the most important of Swanson's career, was later remade as *Rain* (1932), starring Joan Crawford, and then turned into a musical vehicle for Rita Hayworth, *Miss Sadie Thompson* (1953).

Japan will feature in a powerful compilation once again, this time in a montage by the Toy Film Museum of Kyoto, of propaganda films made during the Sino-Japanese War. Another anti-war film of note is ***Peace on the Western Front*** (1930), the first British film to explicitly support pacifism,

which will be seen in Pordenone thanks to a new reconstruction by London's Imperial War Museums.

Stellina, la pescatrice di Venezia (1913), by a director who remains unidentified, is a stunningly colored marvel, shot in Chioggia and Venice, featuring French actress **Madeleine Céliat**.

For **cinema delle origini** [early cinema], Bryony Dixon, Maria Wyke and Ivo Blom will be presenting two programs of Antiquity in Silent Cinema - **Ancient Greece** and **Ancient Rome** - to coincide with the launch of their website "**Museum of Dreamworlds**".

The section also offers a trip around the world... by tram! A series of short films from the early twentieth century celebrates the electric tram as a hallmark of urban modernity, taking us through the streets of San Francisco, New York, Hong Kong, Sydney, Amsterdam, Vienna, Barcelona, Sheffield, and Karlskrona in Sweden, as well as onto the suspension railway of Wuppertal, Germany.

Once again this year, the avant-garde makes its presence felt, with a selection of **Czech experimental shorts**, while an interesting thematic section examines the earliest cinematic depictions of supposed **female madness** and the gender patterns through which it was constructed and visually portrayed in silent cinema. And lastly, "**Sine nomine**" continues to invite expert audiences to challenge each other in a friendly spirit to put a title to short films and fragments lying unidentified in the archives.

We are therefore ready to set off on another journey through time and space, accompanied by the melodies of the festival's extraordinary musicians. For those who will not be able to reach Pordenone this year, thanks to the collaboration with **MYmovies** it will still be possible to follow part of the program online and to "visit" the city: every day, for the entire duration of the festival, a selection of films will be offered via streaming, all accompanied by live music and preceded by introductions that director Jay Weissberg has recorded in various locations around Pordenone.

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