



PORDENONE SILENT FILM FESTIVAL – 45TH EDITION

MARSHALL NEILAN, A FREE SPIRIT IN HOLLYWOOD

The programme for Sunday 4 October 2026 at Pordenone's Teatro Verdi

Press release

American director **Marshall Neilan** is someone worth rediscovering. The tribute dedicated to him at the **Pordenone Silent Film Festival** on Sunday 4 October at 9:00 pm at Teatro Verdi features one of his most successful films, ***Her Wild Oat***, released in 1927, starring **Colleen Moore**. Long denied fame due to his difficult nature and problems with alcohol, Neilan was also known for his versatility, easily moving from comedy to western to melodrama, and for the speed at which he completed his films. In the 1920s, he was one of the highest paid directors in Hollywood, beloved by the biggest stars of the time. **Mary Pickford**, who proclaimed him her favourite director, described him as one of the kindest, most exasperating, gifted and fascinating human beings she had ever met. But she also admitted that there were times she would have gladly strangled him. **Gloria Swanson** considered him the most bewitching man in Hollywood, while **Colleen Moore** described him as a seductive, mad, stubborn Irishman who lived a full and exciting life. While actors loved working with him and forgave his occasional absences from the set, his relationships with producers were not nearly as rosy. He tried to gain independence by establishing his own production company, but made the mistake of antagonising **Louis B. Mayer**, the most powerful man in Hollywood. Describing the hate between them, actress **Blanche Sweet**, who was briefly married to Neilan, said the two men were enemies before they were even born.

In the late 1920s, Neilan had not yet lost all his bankability, and thanks to Colleen Moore and her husband, producer John McCormick, he signed on for ***Her Wild Oat***, a brilliant comedy that can be fully appreciated today thanks to the meticulous restoration by the **Academy Film Archive**. The film is a comedy of errors with perfect comedic timing about a working-class girl from New York's East Side who dreams of climbing the social ladder. In ***Her Wild Oat***, Colleen Moore perfectly incarnates a flapper: young women from the 1920s with their hair cut in short bobs, thumbing their noses at convention. The live musical accompaniment is performed by **Donald Sosin**.

The morning session on Sunday 4 October (10:00 am) features two films by Polish actress and dancer **Pola Negri**, whose sensuality set audiences on fire. In 1920, she performed in five films, starting with ***Die Marchesa D'Armiani*** (US: *Intrigue*) directed by the unjustly forgotten Alfred Halm. The film was long believed to be lost. Fortunately, the first part remains from a Danish distribution copy in excellent condition. It is being presented at the festival courtesy of Filmarchiv Austria. The second film is the 1917 ***Bestia*** (US: *The Polish Dancer*), which was the greatest success of Studio Sfinks of Warsaw, directed by the cosmopolitan visionary director, Aleksander Hertz. Pola Negri's role as the femme fatale, which would follow her throughout her career, was launched with this film, thanks especially to the Apache dance scene. The word 'Apache' came from a Parisian slum gang and indicated a wild and sensual dance representing a violent fight between two lovers. It is possible that this part was refilmed and added for foreign release to pique audiences' curiosity for the erotic aspect of the film. Both the costume she wears and her dance partner in the scene appear nowhere else in the film. All Polish copies of *Bestia* were destroyed during World War II and only a few copies for foreign release have survived.

Female figures are also featured in this year's most original series, "Female Madness", with a group of shorts at 3:00 pm under the title "Donne folli: dalla medicina al melodramma" (Mad women: From medicine to melodrama). The series features scenes filmed inside the Salpêtrière Hospital in Paris, as well as a few fragments filmed by Italian neurologist, **Vincenzo Neri**. The pathological aspects of the various degrees of hysteria, whether real or presumed (the 1912 German film with the Hitchcock-worthy title *Zweimal Gelebt* (Twice Lived) explains how madness can be born of a denial of autonomy and of the power exercised over women), are softened in *Das Versuchskaninchen* (The Guinea-Pig), a 1917 German film in which a wild **Asta Nielsen** flouts the patriarchy, hospitals and physicians.

An important screening on Sunday at 4:45 pm shines a light on Japan with short propaganda films that survived only in small formats from the Second Sino-Japanese War, edited by **Yoneo Ota**, founder of the **Toy Film Museum** of Kyoto. The anthology reverses the meaning of the films, becoming a powerful message against military escalation. In addition to the funeral of Emperor Yoshihito in 1926 and Hirohito's coronation in 1928, the films show the future Axis allies Hitler and Mussolini, as well as striking images of the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941.

The first screening on Sunday afternoon (at 2:00 pm) spotlights the young musicians of "**A colpi di note**", a project created and coordinated by Maria Luisa Sogaro. The youth, all members of the Scuola di Musica and of the Ensemble Armonia in the town of Cordenons, chose three comical short films and composed soundtracks for them. They will perform them at the festival. The character chosen this year was **KoKo** the clown, created by cartoonist **Max Fleischer**, in three films provided by the **Cineteca del Friuli**.

The Pordenone Silent Film Festival / Le Giornate del Cinema Muto is made possible thanks to the support of the Regione Autonoma Friuli Venezia Giulia, the Ministry of Culture – Direzione Generale Cinema, the city of Pordenone, the Pordenone-Udine Chamber of Commerce, the Fondazione Friuli and with the participation of BCC Pordenonese e Monsile.

Pordenone, 3 October 2026

Le Giornate del Cinema Muto / Pordenone Silent Film Festival – Press Office

Info

www.giornatedelcinemamuto.it

info.gcm@cinetecadelfriuli.org

Infoline: 389 160 3000

Social media

[YouTube.com/user/GiornateCinemaMuto](https://www.youtube.com/user/GiornateCinemaMuto)

Facebook: @pordenonesilent

Instagram: @pordenonesilent

TikTok: @pordenonesilent

Flickr: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/giornatecinemamuto/>

Press Office

press.gcm@cinetecadelfriuli.org

Giuliana Puppini + 39 328 1080422 / Moira Cussigh + 39 328 6785049
Fulvio Toffoli + 39 366 2116251 / Lionella Bianca Fiorillo + 39 340 7364203