



PORDENONE SILENT FILM FESTIVAL – 45TH EDITION

LON CHANEY, MARINE SERGEANT

Programme for Tuesday 6 October 2026 at Pordenone's Teatro Verdi

Press release

The **Pordenone Silent Film Festival** continues on Tuesday 6 October (Teatro Verdi), and what is immediately striking in the evening's film (9:00 pm) is the presence of the great actor **Lon Chaney**, in a role that is, for him, unusual. ***Tell It to the Marines*** (1926), directed by George Hill, is an action-packed comedy starring Lon Chaney as a tough drill sergeant struggling with George 'Skeet' Burns, a dandy recruit, played by William Haines, who is unsuited to harsh Marines discipline. Chaney was already known as the "Man of a Thousand Faces", having transformed himself through makeup and physical posture into the Hunchback of Notre Dame and the Phantom of the Opera. In this film, he just needed to put on a uniform. Paradoxically, while *Tell It to the Marines* was his biggest commercial success, he is best remembered as an exceptional horror film actor, bringing humanity to monstrous or deformed beings. In *Tell It to the Marines*, the two men are rivals for the love of the attractive nurse Norma (Eleanor Boardman), and it's clear how the story will end. Beyond its sentimental aspect, the film's strength lies in its war scenes that required massive support from the Marine corps. Much of the film was shot at the military base in San Diego, in the Philippines, in Shanghai and on board the flagship vessel California that was later torpedoed and sunk by the Japanese at Pearl Harbour. The lead consultant for the production was General Smedley D. Butler, whose friendship with Chaney continued until the actor's death. *Tell It to the Marines* was the first time that Hollywood, a leading man (Lon Chaney was the first Honorary Marine of cinema) and the Marine Corps began to realise the power of cinema to build America's public image. The film was shown at the White House for President Calvin Coolidge.

Late Tuesday morning, at 11:30 am, the festival presents one of the first films (1916) directed by **Marshall Neilan**: ***The Country That God Forgot***, a western that could have starred **Tom Mix**, but ultimately featured **Tom Santschi**. Marshall Neilan's idea of the West was not that of "Tom Mix-style" rodeos and horseback riding. Instead, his was a grim western set in the Mojave Desert, portraying the harsh life of a miner working in gruelling conditions, and of his wife, worn down by the monotony and squalor of their existence. The exceptional copy of the film housed at the **George Eastman Museum** confirms the talent of a director who, while still early in his career, already had a sure hand.

Again in the morning, at 10:00 am, the festival presents ***Seven Sinners*** (1925), the first feature-length film by **Lewis Milestone**, a Russian Jew who immigrated to Hollywood, and the creator of significant war films inspired by literature (he went on to win an Academy Award for *All Quiet on the Western Front*). The star of *Seven Sinners*, **Marie Prevost**, was certainly no beginner. In fact, she was one of the hottest actresses in Hollywood and a favourite of Ernst Lubitsch. It is interesting to note that the screenplay of the film, a strange comedy about clumsy burglars, was written by both Milestone and **Darryl F. Zanuck**, future head of 20th Century Fox.

At 3:30 pm, the afternoon feature is a title not to be missed in the series dedicated to Weimar's cinematography: ***Der Reigen*** [The Merry-Go-Round], directed by **Richard Oswald** in 1920. The story is that of a poor girl, Elena (**Asta Nielsen**), who falls into the clutches of a cabaret owner (played by **Conrad Veidt**, the legendary star of *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*) who tries to draw her into prostitution. When Elena sees the prospect of a normal life, all her illusions collapse and it is the

end for her. *Der Reigen* reflects an extremely pessimistic vision of social relations and the impossibility of a better life for the very poor. Audiences feel sympathy for Elena, while the male characters are sordid and guided only by a desire for sexual control.

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, 5 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)

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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