



PORDENONE SILENT FILM FESTIVAL – 45th EDITION

QUEEN OF THE SILENT SCREEN: GLORIA SWANSON

The program for Friday 9 October at Pordenone's Teatro Verdi

Press Release

Of all the many stars of Hollywood's silent film era, the brightest is **Gloria Swanson**, who for everyone became the immortal icon of an era with Billy Wilder's *Sunset Boulevard*, the sound film that marked her return to the screen after many years, alongside Erich von Stroheim, the man responsible for the greatest production failure of the actress' career.

From a young age Gloria Swanson showed determination to break into the movies; at eighteen she was signed by producer Mack Sennett as one of the Bathing Beauties. Her versatility as an actress, her personality and her charm were immediately recognized by Cecil B. DeMille, one of the most influential figures of American cinema, who brought her into Paramount. Tired of the roles she was being cast in and impatient with Hollywood's production strategies, in 1927 she founded **Gloria Swanson Productions** with the help of the influential Joseph Kennedy, father of the future President of the United States. The second film from the new production company, based on a short story by **Somerset Maugham**, was ***Sadie Thompson*** (1928), which will be screened at the **Pordenone Silent Film Festival** on Friday evening at 9 pm at the Teatro Verdi after the presentation of the **2026 Jean Mitry Award** to **Catherine Cormon** and **Elif Rongen-Kaynakçi**, both from the Eye Filmmuseum in Amsterdam.

Gloria Swanson, whose image dominates the festival poster, shaped the leading role to her own measure: a fascinating, determined and combative woman who makes her own way in the world. Her male counterpart is **Lionel Barrymore**, and the screen adaptation is by **Raoul Walsh**, who is also credited as producer, director and actor. The subject was initially deemed unsuitable by the censors but Walsh made the necessary changes to get round the prohibitions. ***Sadie Thompson*** proved a great success with audiences and critics alike, and Swanson's performance – along with the cinematography – was nominated at the first Academy Awards. In the course of her career she received two more Best Actress nominations but never managed to win the Oscar. Two remakes of *Sadie Thompson* were made: *Rain* (1932), directed by Lewis Milestone with Joan Crawford and Walter Huston, and *Miss Sadie Thompson* (1953) by Curtis Bernhardt, with Rita Hayworth and José Ferrer. The end of Gloria Swanson's career coincided with what would be her last venture as a producer, when she was involved in an ill-fated film, Erich von Stroheim's *Queen Kelly*.

To show that war "is not a childish game, a glorious adventure" but "a hideous ugly thing" is the declared aim of the film that opens the afternoon program on Friday 9 October, at 2 pm, again at the Teatro Verdi: ***Peace on the Western Front***, a title that echoes that of the most famous anti-militarist film of all time, *All Quiet on the Western Front* by Lewis Milestone.

Peace on the Western Front was made in 1930, when two war veterans, the German **Hans Nieter** and the Briton **Fred Swann**, joined forces to film a pilgrimage through the battlefields of the Great War and to convey their message to younger generations; it was not the first film of its kind, but it was certainly the first to be conceived in a pacifist and internationalist spirit. Besides the two directors, almost all the members of the production unit had fought in WWI. The dialogue sequences are by **Eliot Stannard**, Hitchcock's first major screenwriter, with whom he worked on eight films, including *The Lodger*. Another important contribution came from the writer and wildlife documentarist **Ratcliffe Holmes**, who is credited as narrator but – given his military experience and his previous work on *The Battle of the Somme*, for which he provided live commentary during public screenings

– is probably also the author of the passages describing the battlefield scenes. *Peace on the Western Front* was released at the end of 1930 as a supporting feature but won the attention of audiences, critics and the nascent peace movement itself, thanks in part to its sincerity, heartfelt yet free of needless sensationalism. In October and November 1932, the film was still being shown in cinemas. The restoration by the **IWM (Imperial War Museums)**, London, which is being presented at the Pordenone Silent Film Festival, is the result of work that began with an initial digital restoration in 2012; the original soundtrack and script were considered lost. A script was produced with the help of a lip-reading expert, the synopsis in the pressbook and period descriptions of the battlefields. Then, on New Year's Day 2026, following an appeal by IWM, one of the two original sound discs was found, containing the tracks for reels 2 and 4, which have now been synchronized with the film. The original sound for reels 1 and 3 is still missing, therefore these will be shown with the script summary previously created by IWM, narrated here by **Toby Haggith** and **Clare Watson**, with musical accompaniment by **Stephen Horne**.

For the **Weimar Uncensored** section, at 10:30 am audiences will see ***Genuine. The Tragedy of a Strange House*** (1920) by **Robert Wiene** - the director fresh from the international success of *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*. For this new film, the producers brought together the same team, including screenwriter Carl Mayer and cameraman Willy Hameister. At the center of the story is a female vampire thirsty for men's blood, held prisoner in an underground cave by an eccentric lord. Dressed in bizarre costumes, the star, **Fern Andra**, writhes throughout the film, giving free rein to her desires and her thirst for blood. At its premiere, *Genuine* sparked heated controversy: the audience was split between boos and applause, and some spectators even demanded refunds. Despite the scandal, the film was shown in almost every German city, sometimes in several theaters at once, and stayed on the bill longer than originally planned. In Austria, on the other hand, the film was banned by the police censors. When *Genuine* was sold to France in 1922, Wiene was asked to radically rework the film to make it acceptable to audiences but, above all, to French censors. The French version was therefore cut by more than a quarter compared with the version approved by German censors. Explicitly presented as a dream, the film proved less disturbing and, as a work of art, it received more unanimous approval than in Germany. Long believed to be lost, *Genuine* has been reconstructed from prints of a reworked French version.

Comedy has always been an essential part of the Festival, and this year its origins are explored through the earliest examples of a genre that is now very popular, especially on television: the **sitcom**, which portrays situations of family life with its misunderstandings and good-natured squabbles – a format made successful in the United States by **Mr. and Mrs. Sidney Drew**. On Friday 9, starting at 12:15 pm, the programme includes *By Might of His Right*, *His Wife Knew About It*, *At a Premium* and *Her Obsession*, all produced by the couple between 1915 and 1916.

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.

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

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

Info

www.giornatedelcinemamuto.it
info.gcm@cinetecadelfriuli.org
Infoline: 389 160 3000

Social media

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