



PORDENONE SILENT FILM FESTIVAL – 45TH EDITION

JOHN FORD'S *THE IRON HORSE*, ACCOMPANIED BY THE ORCHESTRA, WILL CLOSE THE FESTIVAL

The programme for Saturday 10 October 2026 at Pordenone's Teatro Verdi

Press release

Crowning the 45th edition of the Pordenone Silent Film Festival, on Saturday 10 October at 9:00 pm at Teatro Verdi, is one of the greatest westerns of the silent era, **John Ford's *The Iron Horse***. The film will be presented in the 35 mm copy of **Photoplay** London, with **John Lanchbery's** score performed by the **Pordenone Chamber Orchestra** conducted by **Ben Palmer**. The event will be repeated on Sunday at 4:30 pm.

After directing dozens of short films and feature films (not just westerns), John Ford's big break came in 1924: 20th Century Fox decided to immediately replicate the huge success of Paramount's *The Covered Wagon* (1923) with its own super western, providing vast financial resources and support to the young director. *The Iron Horse* tells the story of the construction of the first transcontinental railroad from Omaha, Nebraska, to Sacramento, California, between 1863 and 1869, marking the end of the old wagon trail. The work is an epic tale that inspired generations of filmmakers (including Sergio Leone) with spectacular sequences in which the trains' direction and type of movement contrasts with the livestock and men on horseback. The film was shot mostly on location in the desert highlands near Reno, Nevada. The conditions were terrible: it was winter, very cold, and the technicians and actors were housed in unheated railway cars rented from a circus or in the set buildings constructed to recreate a Cheyenne village. There were hundreds of extras, including Chinese, Irish and Payute workers. Fox could have hired an established star as the lead, but decided instead to cast an up-and-coming actor, **George O'Brien**, while the female role was given to **Madge Bellamy**, who had already appeared in several comedies.

Throughout the week, the festival has offered a fascinating ride around the world on trams in a series of early short films. In the early decades of the twentieth century, electric tramways were a distinctive feature of urban modernity and offered the advantage of having a convenient platform on which to mount movie cameras, making them one of the favourite vehicles to film "phantom tram rides". The last ride, starting at 9:00 pm, before John Ford's film, is ***Tram Ride Through Rochdale*** (1905) by Sagar Mitchell and James Kenyon, showing the extraordinary frequency of tram service, the hustle and bustle of the streets, and the nonchalance with which pedestrians and cyclists crossed in front of the trams.

On Saturday morning, the screenings will move to Cinemazero for a few hours, while the orchestra rehearses for the closing night at Teatro Verdi. The program begins with the Italian-German production ***Villa Falconieri***, based on the novel of the same name by Richard Voss, who is very well known in Germany. The film adaptation, presented as part of the section dedicated to Lazio, features **Richard Oswald** as director and **Giovanni Vitrotti** as cinematographer.

At 11:30 am, it's time for Sidney Olcott's ***The Humming Bird***, the second film in this edition – following *Sadie Thompson* – starring Gloria Swanson. Irked by the control of Paramount executives, Gloria Swanson left Hollywood for New York in July 1923 for what was intended to be a short medical leave. She ended up remaining there for three years, yet she was still able to fulfil her contract with

Paramount by working at the company's massive studio in Astoria. *The Humming Bird* was initially to be directed by Allan Dwan, but filming was delayed and the studio hired **Sidney Olcott** instead, who brought in screenwriter **Forrest Halsey**. Halsey would become Swanson's favourite screenwriter, writing six of his films. Swanson abandons her image as a *femme fatale* in *The Humming Bird*, convincingly portraying a former dancer who becomes a ringleader among the Paris Apache. The crew, led by veteran Olcott, turned Paramount's studio into a credible Montmartre. Halsey focused on the Parisian adventures that are only narrated in Maude Fulton's play the film is based on, including the war: Olcott hired 500 army veterans and staged elaborate trench warfare sequences. *The Humming Bird* was released on 13 January 1924 to great success in the United States. The film was never released in France, however, despite its success in the French-speaking regions of Belgium and Switzerland under the title *Les Loups de Montmartre*.

On Saturday afternoon, the screenings return to the Teatro Verdi for the final stretch. Particularly noteworthy is Jean Epstein's medium-length film ***La Glace à Trois Faces***, a sublime adaptation of a short story by Paul Morand. The film begins with this sentence: "Three women loved a man. But did he love any of them?" The film reconstructs the history of these four souls using a non-linear narrative alternating between past and present. For Epstein, movement occupies an essential place in cinema and defines its very essence. In *La Glace à Trois Faces*, bursts of frantic energy can be seen in the bodies, in the dancing feet, but also in the camera that flies or slides elegantly in the world captured by the lens.

Le Giornate del Cinema Muto Silent Film Festival 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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