

*The* **MOST  
DANGEROUS  
DRINK TANK**

MyS  
2014

# Movies Part One - The Silents

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You should have figured this was coming. *The Drink Tank* is going away, and I have so much I wanna say about movies that might not fit into *Klaus at Gunpoint*. Thus, this three part (+2 parts) series of issues, start with The Silents.

My love of silent film starts with the comedies, of course. No, wait... it starts with Lumiere and Melies and Edison and Edwin Potter and Blackton and on and on and on. These were the films I came across when I was in High School and fell in love with. Then it was the comedies. First Chaplin and Keaton, then I discovered the good stuff - Lloyd, Arbuckle, the Keystone Kops, John Bunny, and on and on. It was these films that helped turn my interest towards film history. In fact, I'd say they're what led me to try and tell stories.

The three issues of the *Drink Tank* will Look at The Silents, then Hollywood - Finding it's Voice, and finally In My Lifetime - Film 1974 to Present. These will be a set of issues that will look at a lot of different things in a lot of different ways. Trust me, stick with us and you'll get why we're doing it.

The +2 is because Vanessa and I will be doing an issue of *Klaus* that will fit in, and there'll be a *Claims Department* that will look at what films have moved me in significant ways. That one's very personal ...



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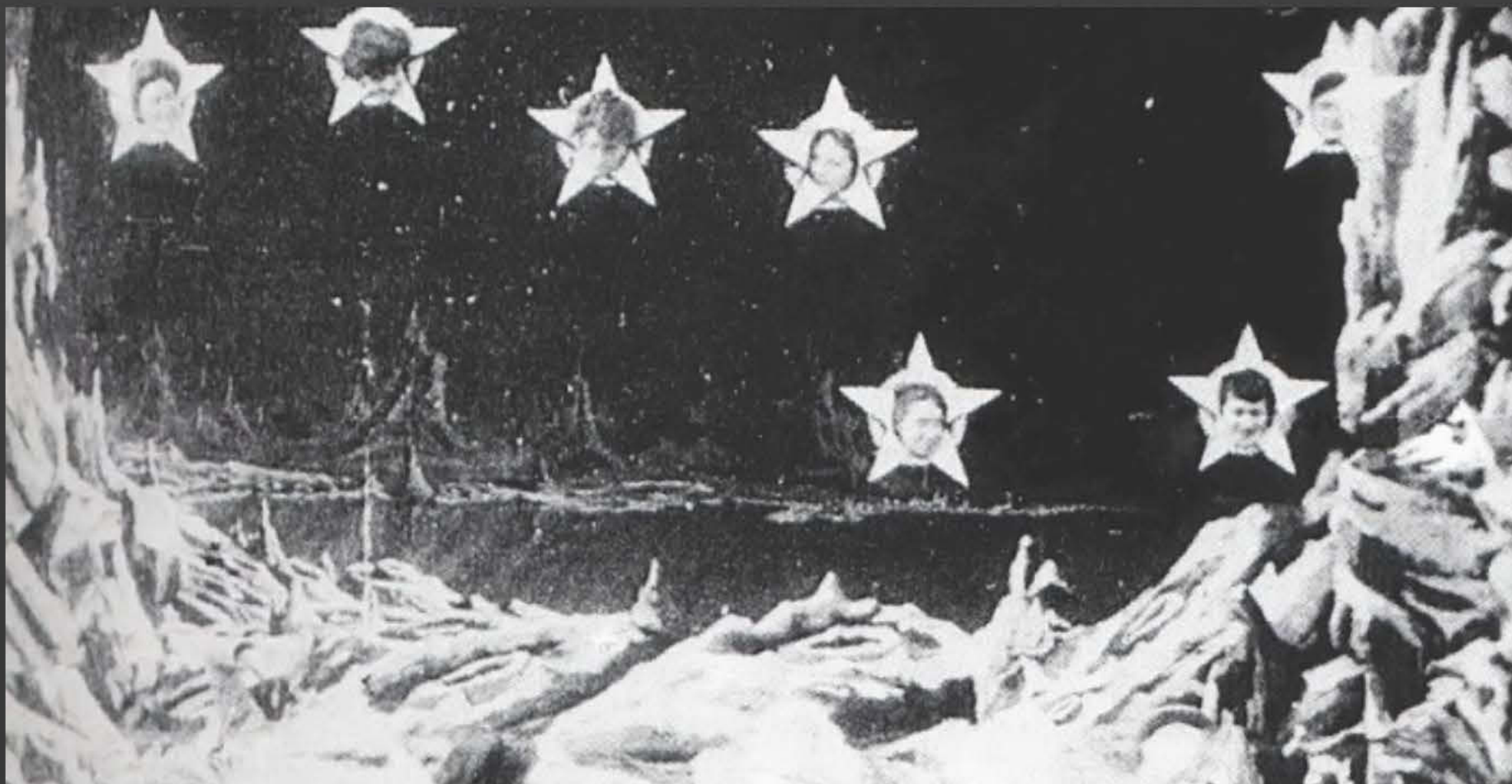
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# FADE IN:

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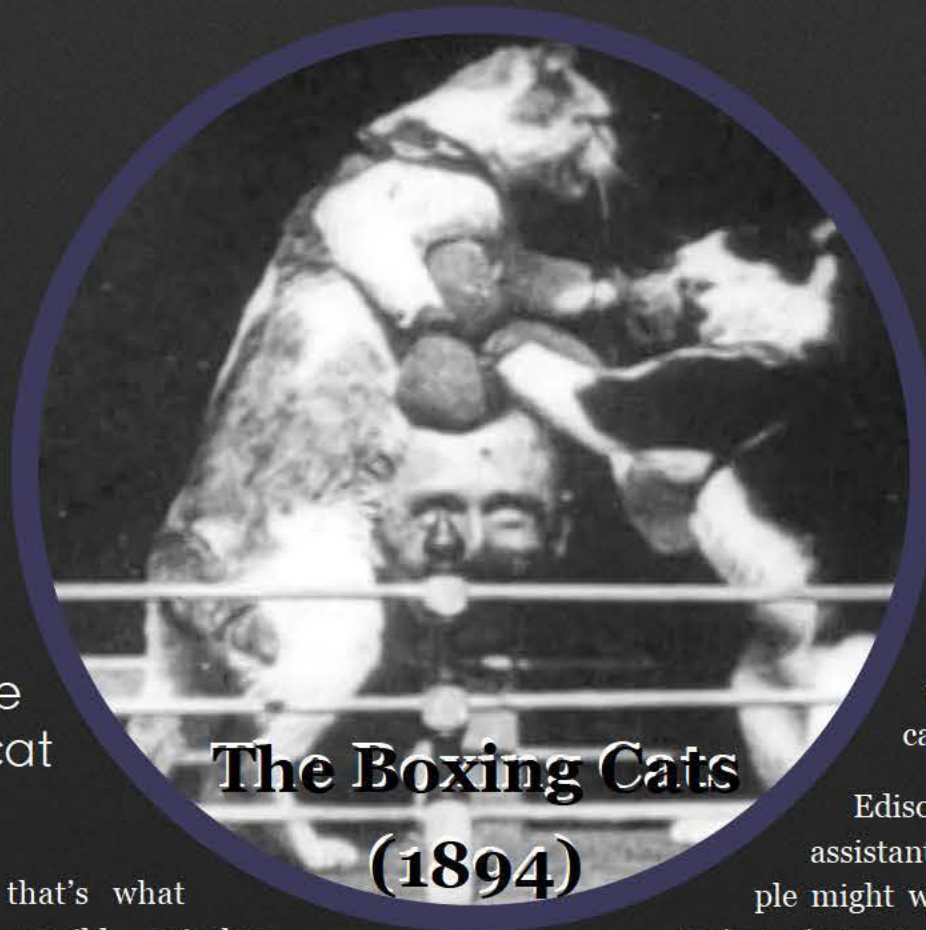


Perhaps faster than any other media, Film progressed incredibly in its first fifteen years. From simple static shots of workers leaving factories and trains pulling into stations lasting no more than a minute, to complex trick films and early features. Film exploded and changed entertainment, as well as education, the arts, and sciences. The figures of those first years would stand tall over the history of the field.

The names that will figure most prominently in this chapter are the founders of film itself. Thomas Edison, the Wizard of Menlo Park, who invented one of the earliest systems for showing movies, and whose ruthless defense of his patents in New Jersey led the movie industry ever-westward. The Lumiere Brothers, who brought the projected image to screens in France. Georges Melies, the man who began our fascination with cinematic trickery. Edwin Potter, the founding father of film editing. J. Stuart Blackton, the master of the Trick Film. And more.

This section takes place before the wide adoption of the Feature Film format, even though *The Story of the Kelly Gang* was released in 1909. The shorts here were state of the art, for the most part, and represent experimentation. The documentary form was the first to be defined, followed by narrative, and finally, avant garde. The evolution of film in this period is as fast as you'll ever find, and the public responded so quickly. The only thing comparable that I can think of is the explosion of the internet between between 1995 and 2010. In fact, that might put film to shame...

# There Have Always Been Cat Videos



When I think of the internet, I think of cat videos.

Now, I know you think that's what PROVES that the internet is a terrible, pointless thing. It's possibly true, but the obsession with Cat footage is hardly new.

As any film student who has sat through the first day of Introduction to Film History will tell you, Edison was a rat bastard who made hundreds of "Actualities", little, minute-long movies in the documentary-style... sort of. The entire film industry was founded on giving people the view of the world, and usually the view of Urban life. Someone would put a camera on the front of a subway train, or would shoot people just walking through the streets of a major city. The works of Edwin Potter and Georges Melies to establish film as a story-telling medium helped to kill the Actualities... at least until we had the Internet. What once were Actualities are now Viral Videos.

The thing is, people were longing to look at ANYTHING back then. it was so easy to be a film producer. Step One - Get a camera. Step two - point it at something. Step three - profit. That easy. The marvel of Cinema was new and to a degree, over-powering. These films are less documentaries and more events. They're almost ethnographic films, recording the moments of the world as they happen. Even if

those events are forced into the camera lens.

Edison had a solid idea. He'd have his assistants bring in stuff they thought people might want to see from Vaudeville, the major circuses, even boxing and wrestling matches. So you'd see films of Strongmen like Sandow, or *Caicedo: King of the Slack Wire*.

Professor Welton had a Cat Circus. They rode bikes, they pranced and did other tricks, but by far, his Cat Boxing display was the most popular. Thus, it made sense that the Wizard of Menlo Park would want to capture the marvel! These movies, shown in parlors to one person at a time in a device called a Kinetoscope. It allowed for less than 1 minute of film to run by, which was enough because people would have been blown away. It was not shown with the first set of films (which included Sandow and a Cockfight film), but it was hugely popular.

The video has been on the Internet as long as I can remember. I'm pretty sure the first three sites were CERN's homepage, someone posting the Exploding Whale video, and Boxing Cats. You can see one of many versions on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k52pLvVmmkU>

And once you watch it, you'll be aware of something I've always known - Cats are no good at the Sweet Science

# The Great Train Robbery (1903) A Silent Film Review By Fritzi Kramer

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## BANG! BANG!

One of the earliest blockbusters, this film is a legend in the history of cinema. But how does it hold up (no pun intended) for the modern viewer? The story involves the execution of a daring train robbery and the subsequent posse pursuit. Exciting stuff or a creaky relic?

### Availability

Available on DVD.

Another day, another acclaimed classic.

It's often cited as the film that made the spawned the movie culture. It's also called the first blockbuster, the first movie, the first narrative film...

In spite of its popularity, or perhaps because of it, *The Great Train Robbery* has a lot of misconceptions associated with it.

Since the film is rather short and the plot is not terribly involved, I thought this would be a good place for a question and answer session.

I plan to debunk a few myths that have attached themselves to the film, as well as give a bit of background on the making of the movie itself.

Ready? Let's go!

**“The Great Train Robbery is a 1903 American Western film by Edwin S. Porter. Twelve minutes long, it is considered a milestone in film making, expanding on Porter's previous work *Life of an American Fireman*. The film used a number of innovative techniques including cross cutting, double exposure composite editing, camera movement and on location shooting. Cross-cuts were a new, sophisticated editing technique. Some prints were also hand colored in certain scenes. None of the techniques were original to *The Great Train Robbery*, and it is now considered that it was heavily influenced by Frank Mottershaw's earlier British film *A Daring Daylight Burglary*. The film uses simple editing techniques (each scene is a single shot) and the story is mostly linear (with only a few "meanwhile" moments), but it represents a significant step in movie making, being one of the first "narrative" movies of significant length. It was quite successful in theaters and was imitated many times.”**

**I heard this is the first silent movie or the first movie with a plot. Is this true?**

This isn't the first silent film. Or the first silent narrative film. [As TCM put it](#), *The Great Train Robbery* “became the first influential narrative film in which the editing was imaginative and contributed to the narrative.”

Not quite as snappy as *The First Silent Movie* but we take what we can get.

**What is the movie about?**

This is an action western. It wastes no time on frivolity and quickly gets down to business. A gang of robbers overpower a railway station clerk, sneak aboard a passenger train and then proceed to strip it of valuables. They blow up the safe (with a pink and orange hand-colored explosion) and then rob every last passenger. The gang gets clean away but a posse soon pursues them to mete out Western justice.

Or is it New Jersey justice? *The Great Train Robbery* was an east coast creation (like most American films at the time) and was shot in Milltown, New Jersey.

**Is the movie based on real events or a fictional work?**

It was mildly based on an 1896 melodrama of the same title by Scott Marble, though the story was streamlined considerably for the movies. (It has also been suggested that the film was inspired by a 1900 train robbery committed by Butch Cassidy— yes, that Butch Cassidy— which is possible considering the amount of attention Butch and his gang received from the press.)

**Are there any recognizable stars in the film?**

As was the custom at the time, no actors were given onscreen credit. G.M. Anderson played several extra roles in the film, most significantly as the train passenger who tries to flee and gets plugged for his troubles. A few years later, he would adopt the persona of Broncho Billy and prevent these sort of villainous happenings.

The leader of the bandits (and the fellow who famously shoots directly into the camera) was Justus D. Barnes. What an ideal name for a western actor! He acted prolifically until 1917.

**Will a modern audience like this movie?**

At this point in time, we are used to rooting for thieves, bandits and ne'er-do-wells of all stripes. *The Great Train Robbery* does not invite the audience to sympathize with its villains. The movie was meant to shock and horrify by showing [realistic western violence](#).

We tend to forget that in 1903, the western setting was not a time period but a place. This wasn't history. It was torn from the headlines.

In general, though, modern viewers should have no trouble with the story. Its narrative is clear (note the lack of intertitles!) and director Edwin S. Porter keeps things fast-paced. Further, the outdoor shots and decidedly un-glamorous cast

## FROM TIM DIRKS OF TCM

**“The remarkable film was greeted with the same kind of fanfare that Sam Peckinpah's violent *The Wild Bunch* (1969) received many years later.”**

gives the movie a documentary feel. There are some studio scenes (with matte shots adding visual interest) but much of the movie takes place in the great outdoors.

That being said, viewers who are used to more rapid editing and closeups may find this older style of filmmaking difficult to get used to. I recommend starting an absolute newcomer out on something from Melies.

### **What about those scenes with color?**

The color was added by hand to individual frames. It was not a precise art but the shimmering tints are quite charming and add considerably to the film.

### **Where can I see it?**

*The Great Train Robbery* is widely available on DVD and via [streaming](#). High quality versions are also available in numerous box sets. My copy is from The Movies Begin box set.

First appeared at [MoviesSilently.com](#)





# An American Melies - J. Stuart Blackton



It seems as if the belief is Melies invented everything. The Trick Film? That was Melies. The special effect? That was Melies. Narrative film? Total Melies. The fact is, there were others, and some of them were actually better than the French Magician. In fact, the greatest of them had to be an American who came to be associated with the Trick Film. His name was James Stuart Blackton, and he created a new American Cinema.

Blackton was an important cartoonist in the late 1890s. He was working for the *New York Evening Post*, and he was sent along to see Edison's latest invention. He had drawn a lot of wonderful cartoons, and the story goes that Blackton was invited to draw the legendary Wizard of Menlo Park at a sitting, during which Edison decided that he was going to allow Blackton to make movies for him. This, sadly, is not the case. Instead, the truth is Blackton was working as a sketch artist alongside a magician, and at a major performance that was being filmed by the Edison company, he absolutely killed it with his audience, was the star of the night, and caught the

attention of the good Edisonian people. It was 1896, the Lumieres in France were just doin' their thing, Melies was developing his camera, and a number of others were working, but non had the reach, or the number of outlets, that Edison did.

Blackton made three Edison shorts. They were all of him drawing in his entertaining style. More importantly, he founded a company, American Vitagraph Company, and they began to produce films, at one point being America's largest producers of films. At first, like everyone else, they were doing Actualities, but later, it was all about films using tricks. The one that sold much of the public was called *The Enchanted Drawing*.

It's on YouTube, and it's a lot of fun. It's an artist, played by Blackton himself, who draws a guy, and some pieces for him, and then starts to pull them out of the picture and play with them. It's adorable, and the funny thing is, it's EXACTLY what Melies was doing six or seven years before. It's only a couple of minutes long, but it's fun. Like Melies, Blackton took his training and applied it to his films. In this case, it's

his drawing. He's a natural performer, Blackton. He works with his drawing as a character, which is adorable. If you compare this with a rather similar Melies piece, let's say *The Vanishing Lady*, you'll see that Blackton has managed slightly more in the area of story than The Magician did. *The Vanishing Lady* is a simple series of tricks performed by a magician. There is interaction, but it's nothing like a stage show. Melies' performer charisma is there, but he's playing to the audience in a way as if he's on a stage. Blackton is playing to the audience as if they are viewing him on a screen. Blackton has to give life to the drawing, which isn't really animated much, but at least a little. Blackton had done a little animation as early as 1900, which makes him one of the earliest practitioners of the art. Here, he's mixed some animation with camera trickery, where he would have a drawn image and then seem to pull it off the page and hold it in the physical world. With Melies, he had an actress to play the lady and that seems easier, but it also forced us to accept that it's a scene that lives in our reality. In Blackton's vision, it's an alternate world where pictures are alive. This concept of live-action mingling with the drawn world has been repeated in film ever since, notably in things like *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*, *Duck Amok*, and *Cool World*.

This was hardly Blackton's only impressive work. Vitagraph was hugely important for decades, and Blackton was one of the most visionary filmmakers they had. The piece that many consider to be his masterwork is *Princess Nicotine*, or *The Smoke Fairy*. It was made in 1909 and was a landmark in many different directions. This is a Trick Film, where Blackton used every camera trick known, and invented a couple of new ones. The story is a smoker wants to light up a cigar, but a fairy princess interrupts him and makes it difficult, so he douses her with seltzer and traps her under a glass dome. All in good fun, no?

Here's why this delightful little short is so important. Blackton had limited tricks at his disposal, but he used them so well. Forced perspective allows it to seem like he's trapped the Fairy under the dome. He used stop-motion, a rarity in those days, to make it appear a cigar had de- and then re-assembled itself. He uses split screen effects, masking, jumps, some beautiful over-cranking, over-sized props, and most importantly, POV focus. We see him look through a magnifying glass and we can see what he sees. This may seem a bit pedestrian, and some other filmmakers had done it, but none with the obvious acceptance and grace of Blackton.

Blackton also invented Product Placement, as the Sweet Corporal Cigarette & Cigar company paid to have their name included, which is made all the funnier by the fact that this plays like an anti-smoking ad! It shows the Fairies trying to stop our friend from smoking, and Sweet bought into it! That forever changed the way movies were made and financed, and there really wouldn't be another innovation like it until Crowd-funding.

Blackton's well-remembered among film history types. And he should be. He's a major figure, and *Princess Nicotine* is on the National Film Registry. His story, while maybe not as sexy as Melies, is so important, and his innovations were just as significant. If you look at who had more impact on the way film evolved, Blackton's Vitagraph takes the cake, though Melies probably had more impact on genre film storytelling.

You can find some great Blackton films at

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL4D234E5CDFFC8559>



# On Silent Film By Rachael Grace

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Whether it be a rocket ship hitting the eye of the moon, a busy train scene, a slapstick comedy, or an epic melodrama – silent films are perhaps the most fascinating era of film for both the cinephile and casual movie lover. Silent films depict humanity’s first forays in the exploration of witnessing ourselves with the moving picture. They sparked an addiction which evolved into art, entertainment, a ceaseless archival experiment, and an endless possibility of imagination and creation.

What started with a simple scene at a train station with humans entering and exiting a train became a revolution for how we interact with ourselves. “Arrival of a Train” remains a classic iconic film as it evokes more than an intellectual appreciation for it being the first film ever made. Rather, the participants, naïve of their roles, were living the roles of their lives freely and without pretense – thus, allowing fascinating documentation of everyday behavior. This first film, silent in its recording, created the cacophony of music that the moving picture is today.

In the 21st century, the moving picture has evolved into mundane surveillance, reality TV, works of art, and journalism. In the age of digital “selfies” and the constant recording of the mundane, the parallels of what the film medium represents at its heart, from that first film to today, is, perhaps, never clearer.

Yet, within that first film, also lies the magic of film. From watching a simple scene, the human mind is drawn to wonder where the people are coming from, where they are going, who they are with, and why. We crave stories and to fulfill our curiosity.

“Arrival of a Train” sparked imaginations around the globe. Only six years later, George Melies unveiled “Le Voyage dans La Lune,” 1902, where he explored space travel, an animated persona in the man on the moon, and a rocket landing in the moon’s eye. Melies dedicated years of his life to capturing the fantastic on film, inspiring generations of filmmakers. Narrative storylines quickly established their dominance with epic melodramas, Charlie Chaplin, and dystopian masterpieces such as “Metropolis” by Fritz Lang in 1927.

In their novelty, silent films offer something most TV and film cannot today. Every film, whether silly or profound, was an experiment of how to explore and capture our world and what it means to be human.

From that purity, moments were captured that invoke the imagination and take the breath away in the present day.

- Rachael Grace. August 28th, 2014. NYC.



# Chris Garcia's Favorite Pre-1910 Films

I've watched a lot of early films. I love them. I think that when your form is new, and we're all naive, we produce works that are more honest, still full of the Gosh WOW! That's something that you find in nearly every field,

The films made before 1910 are typically simple, but many feature rich sets and costumes. There are a lot of great early shorts on <http://www.archive.org> and, of course, on YouTube. Vimeo has some as well, as does the Library of Congress (LoC.gov), but the best thing to do to get a view on American pre-1910 film, pick up one of the Treasures of American Film Archives DVD sets!

## **Wild Bill's Wild West Show (1894)**

A record of Will Bill's famous show. Only lasts a minute, but is one of the few records of acts that changed American stagecraft. Annie Oakley is the highlight!

## **The Execution of Mary Queen of Scotts (1895)**

The Edisonians made this cheap trick film, which runs all of 18 seconds, but really convinced some viewers that they had chopped her head off!

## **Little Tich and His Funny Feet (1900)**

This French film is the only surviving footage of Little Tich's Big Boot act. He's really good, and this one minute short is a wonderful record not only of his act, but of Vaudeville-like theatre.

## **A Trip to the Moon (1902)**

Perhaps the most important science fiction film ever made.

## **The Great Train Robbery (1903)**

Really led to the concept of editing, and it manages to tell an actual, interesting story!

## **The Impossible Voyage (1904)**

Lesser-known than Melies' 1902 film, This one is both beautiful and full of visual inventiveness.

## **Interior New York Subway (1905)**

A POV short of a train on the then Brand New Long Island Railroad. Fun!

## **The Black Hand (1906)**

The first Gangster movie. It's a bit confusing to a modern audience, but it really captures what Gangsters were like before the 1920s when they became Pop Stars

## **Trip Down Market St., San Francisco (1906)**

A trolley trip down Market St. showing what that part of town looked like pre-Earthquake!



# CUT TO:

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Once you've invented something, but before it is mature, there is a period of discovery and re-discovery. In Rock 'n Roll, this was the era of Punk. In wrestling, the Work-Shoot period in the early 1990s. In film, it was the second decade of the 20th century.

So many of the things that we consider to be a part of film came about in the period between 1910 and 1920. The feature film was one of them. The documentary became a thing separate from narrative. The studio system. Movie stars. They all came about in that decade.

And with all of it, films became more and more a part of the world. Purpose-built movie theatres started popping up, some of which are still with us. Less than 20 percent of the population had seen a movie in 1900. More than 50 percent had by 1910!

CUT TO: 1910 - 1920

# 1910 - THE YEAR MOVIES WERE MADE

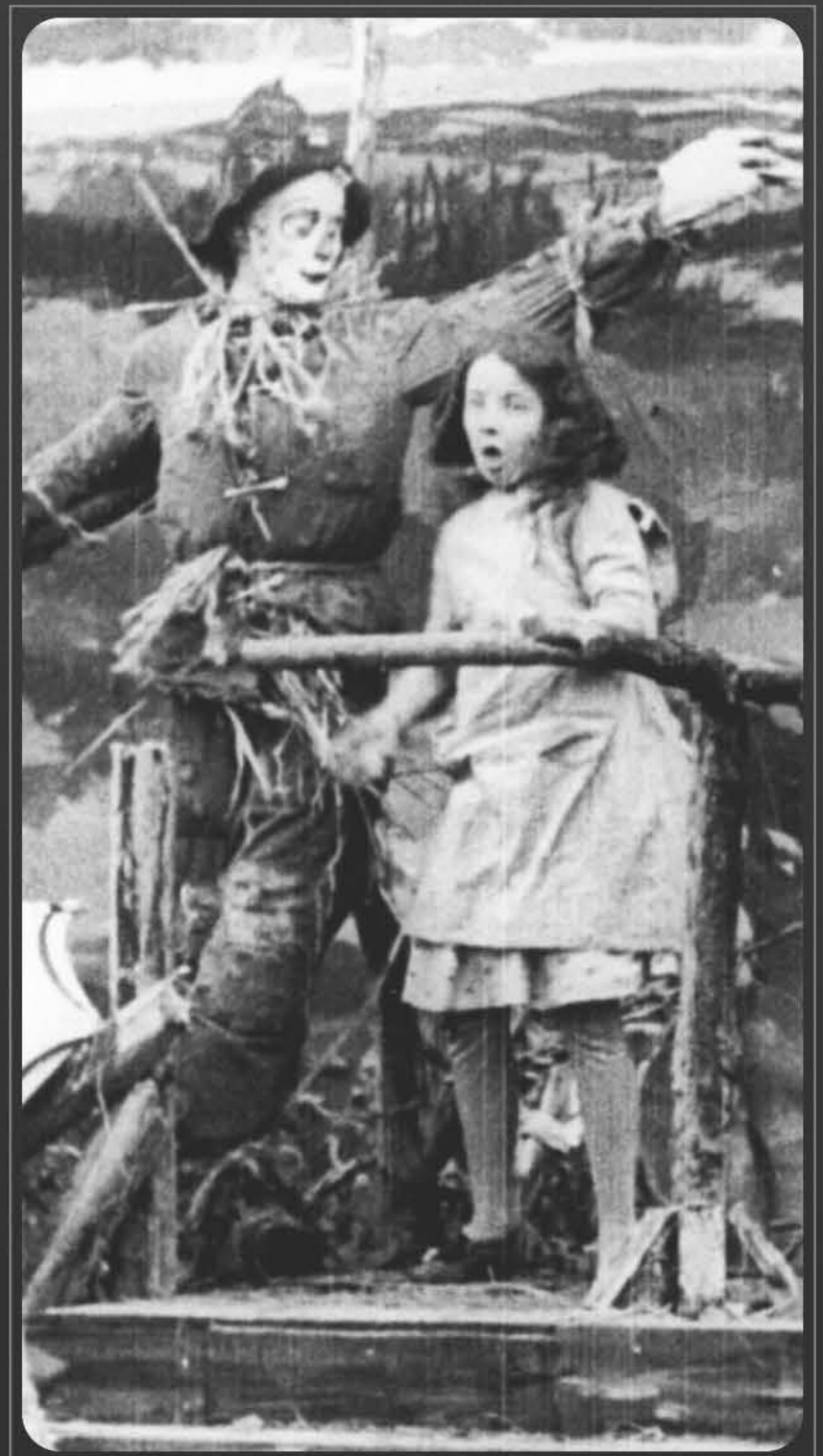
by

*Chris Garcia*

If there was a banner year in the creation of the movies, The list of firsts for 1910 is impressive. The first narrative feature film had shown in Australia in 1909, *The Story of Ned Kelly*, but in the US, it was *The Life of Moses* that takes the distinction of being the first American Feature Film. It was a five-reeler that played in New Orleans in December of 1909, and touring around after that. It was 5 full reels, directed by the great J. Stuart Blackton. Originally, it was five short films, but they were put together to tell one story, thus, a feature in the style of *Four Rooms*. The film was something of a success, though exhibitors complained because they were being told that they could only show one movie in a particular order. This was a first, and kinda a bummer. When it toured as a feature, it really represented the start of American Feature Films... sort of.

There had been non-narrative Features shown as early as 1897. *The Fitzsimmons-Corbett* fight was arguably the first. It ran almost two hours, was a helluva fight, and fragments still survive today. There were other boxing matches, and I believe several baseball games, that were released in theatres. When the biggest wrestling match in history took place, the legendary Gotch-Hackenschmidt

Yes, there  
were films  
before 1909,  
but it was 1910  
when we got  
movies.



*The films of 1910 were a step above everything that had come before, and more importantly, they introduced many of the major players for the next two decades*

fight, they made more money off the rights to the filming than on the fight itself. Go figure.

Still, shorts were still rule, though experiments with releasing features were being made, mostly in Europe. In the US, filmmakers were experimenting with two reels and other techniques for making ever-grander films. In addition, they were experimenting with new ways of making movies.

Carl Laemmle had founded Independent Motion Picture Company in 1909 in New York and New Jersey. It quickly became a major player because Laemmle understood the power of the star. He invented the death hoax, perhaps. He put out that The Biograph Girl (who had become his biggest star), Florence Lawrence, had died, but then Laemmle said that she was alive and well and would be appearing at the premiere of her new movie in St. Louis! It was, without doubt, the biggest scam a producer had ever pulled on the public up to that point. It was brilliant, and it made him a lot of money.

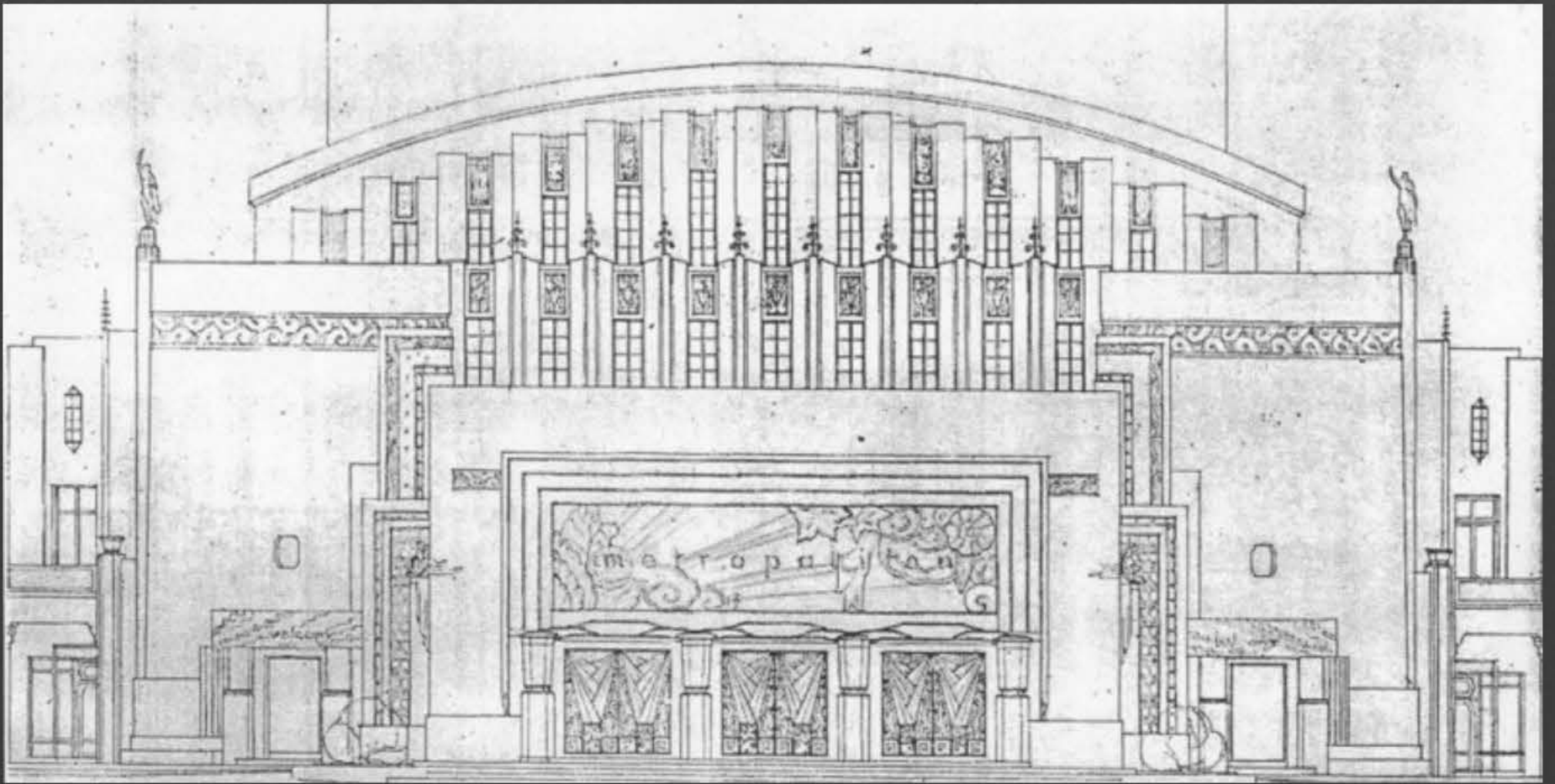
The idea of the Big Star was born in 1910. There were famous actors at that point, but they were seldom sold as the big draw. Up until that point, the draw was the movie itself. That concept was shredded in 1910 with Lawrence, Mary Pickford, Tom Mix, a popular stage actor who debuted to great fanfare in 1910, and especially John Bunny.

Bunny was the first comedy superstar, and his films did huge business. His Bun-nyfinches, one- and two-reelers done with Flora Finch, were incredibly popular. His reign was short, he passed away in 1914, but when he did die, it was said that "John Bunny, the Most Famous Man in the World, Has Died."

This changed how movies were promoted, and how filmstars were paid. This is the start of the Star System instead of the company concept, where it was the production and not the individuals, that mattered. Stills and headshots were distributed, and we started to see the rise of film fan magazines. All of these really began in 1910. It became the standard, and changed the way everything was done. Laemmle started the idea of the Personal Appearance by the film stars. He was big on that concept, and he was also shameless. A potent combination!

Basic forms of how films were made had been established, but there were innovations that improved the process. Animation had been a part of filmmaking since at least the late-1890s, and it was almost always pen-on-paper. John Randolph Bray patented the Cel process, which completely changed the way that animation was done, making it possible to create animations with multiple focal points.





ORIGINAL DESIGN SCHEMATICS FOR THE METROPOLITAN THEATRE, MANILA

There had always been make-up used on actors in film, but if you look at the way it was done, more often than not it was the same as theatrical make-up. This changed in 1910 when Max Factor created the first make-up specifically for the screen. This understanding of lighting, and what cameras do to colors. His contribution to cinema history is huge, and he's never been forgotten, luckily. The general techniques he pioneered are still taught, though with largely digital shooting, many have had to be re-thought.

What's odd is that 1910 also seems to be a year of inclusion. The Film Business had been a largely white, male, and often Jewish, business. That slowly started to change (and has gone back and forth over the decades, it seems) We saw the establishment of the first studio completely managed by a woman - Solas Company Studios. They were HUGE, producing hundreds of shorts. They stayed in New Jersey instead of moving out West, and they were very much passed by, but they were such an important part of Film History. They supposedly produced the first film with an all-black cast, though that may not be accurate because

there were black filmmakers prior to that point, but they're films did not penetrate as far into the mainstream.

1910 was also the year that William Foster founded Foster Fotoplay Company, almost certainly the first African-American-owned movie studio. They made what Foster called "race pictures" many of which were slapstick comedies featuring all-black casts. They made a lot of money, but modern Film Historians aren't well-versed and I'm not sure how many of the classics have survived. I do know that his later film, *Black & Tan*, is considered a classic.

Another important first was a film called *White Fawn's Devotion*, directed by James Young Deer. He was supposedly a Winnabego Indian, though this has been disputed. Whether or not it's true, he was one of the first directors to present Indian culture and life in a positive light. *White Fawn's Devotion* is a wonderful little film, and when stacked up alongside any Western of the time, it's an amazing piece of sensitivity, though many today do not see it as such. There was a tradition of Indian film, and luckily some of those films survived because they were duplicated and



sent around, largely by graduate students who thought that they served the purpose of preserving traditional ways of life. Often, they were just used to sell areas to tourists.

Perhaps the best part of the films of 1910 were the films themselves. There were some of the finest, and most influential, films ever made up to that point. The first telling of Mary Shelley's Frankenstein was made by the good people of Edison's studio. It starred Charles Ogle as the monster, and while it's difficult to follow for today's audiences, it's still great stuff! There's White Fawn's Devotion, and Cowboy Justice, and there's the amazingly good version of The Wizard of Oz. The Danish film The Abyss, clearly not an influence on the later James Cameron vehicle, also got out in 1910. It's funny, but before talkies, films were often released around the world because all you had to do with cut in title cards in your language! Easy-peasy!

1910 was a hugely significant year, and I hope you'll take a look at some of the videos out there from that fantastic year!

This is a Great Place to start!

<https://archive.org/search.php?query=1910%20AND%20collection%3Amoviesandfilms>

Some great individual films -

[Frankenstein](#)

[Ramona](#)

[The Wonderful Wizard of OZ](#)

[The Abyss](#)

[A Christmas Carol](#)



CUT TO: 1910 - 1920

# LES VAMPIRES

*A review by  
Andrew Duvall*



**Running Time: 399 minutes**

**Directed By: Louis Feuillade**

**Written by: Louis Feuillade**

**Main Cast: Musidora, Edouard Mathe, Marcel Levesque, Jean Ayme, Fernand Herrmann, Stacia Napierkowska**

FROM ARCHIVE.ORG

“Not enough emphasis can be placed on the serial's grim and stark look, which almost functions as a character of its own. This is a Paris where the gang's activities have seemingly terrified the people to the degree that they refuse to venture out unless it is absolutely unavoidable.”



As a quick sidenote, before the review, here's a little story for ya': So as I mentioned previously, I have researched every movie up through the thirties for their availability. For this particular movie, I had found it on Netflix streaming, and only streaming, as they did not have it to rent. So I get all geared up Sunday night to sit down and tear into the 399 minute epic, I head over to Netflix, click on "Les Vampires" and realize that they only have the first two parts of this ten part serial. So I figure, I'm fucked. So I buzz through the internet looking for possible leads to a link where I can watch the entire thing...and nothing. I head over to Amazon at one point, just to see if it's available on VHS (as I assume the DVD is unavailable, since Netflix doesn't have it) and see that it IS available on DVD and it's somewhere in the neighborhood of \$15. Well, I really don't wanna have a budget for this little journey I'm taking, so that's really not an option...plus I'm broke as a joke. Then I'm thinking if the damn thing's available and only \$15, why the hell doesn't Netflix carry it? Anyway, after a few moments of cursing Netflix, I head over to the Internet Archive website, a nice little site that has a bunch of links to old movies for free. I type in "Les Vampires" and a link pops up, however, on the bottom it says: "Warning, this is not the entire film, just the first 30 minutes". Well GREAT!! So for some odd reason I get the idea to type in the name of just one of the parts, as each part of the ten parts has it's own title. And guess what...it fucking worked baby!! They had the entire ten parts split up into their own link. So all ended well in the magical land of make believe.

If you're interested in the link here it is:

<http://www.archive.org/search.php?query=les%20vampires%20AND%20mediatype%3Amovies>

And now I am forever indebted to Internet Archive, for saving my mission from skipping a movie, after only watching three.

Now then...on to the business at hand...

DID SOMEONE SAY... \*GULP\* ...VAMPIRES?!!

If I were to sum up *Les Vampires* in one word, I think I'd have to pick...LONG. At an overwhelming 399 minutes, I can say that this one was not an easy task to sit through. Although, it wasn't bad at all. The time does get to you after a while, and you just wanna rip your hair out and move on to something different. I started this thing Sunday night and just finished it today, meaning it took me about three days and five sit downs to put this sucker away. Now that I've vented about the length, let me tell ya a bit of the good about this flick.

So as I mentioned above *Les Vampires* is broken up into ten parts, which are each named, which helps a lot in getting through it. Here are the episodes and their names and times.

Each episode really doesn't tie into the next all that much. While the main heroes and their principle mission stay the same, the villains tend to switch back

## ON LES VAMPIRES

“This title was so misleading!  
No Girl-Girl in this one at all!”

Chris Garcia, 2002

and forth between several different characters, with only Irma Vep (an anagram of Vampire and played by Musidora) being a bad "girl" that appears in every episode. Also each episode is different in that the villains have a different plan to thwart the good guys or a different treasure to steal or something in each part.

For me to layout this entire plot to you, would take me as long to write as it took me to watch *Les Vampires*, but I'll give you the just of it.

Phillipe Guerande is a newspaper man, who's sole mission is to hunt the Vampires, a gang that is terrorizing Paris, France. No, they're not ACTUALLY vampires, that's just the name they go by. As I said above, the bad guys tend to switch out, as they are either captured or killed, by the police along with the support of Guerande and his trusty (and very funny) sidekick Mazamette. You got the Grand Vampire, Juan-Jose Moreno, Satanias and lastly, Venomous taking on the job of terrorizing Guerande. Basically, they want him off their case and they'll do anything to get what they want, including capturing his mother, wife and friends. But it seems they are always outsmarted by Guerande, as he always one ups them at every turn.

I was quite surprised by the cleverness of this 1915 film. For some reason I thought it would be very cut and dry, but on the contrary the plot was very well developed and very intricate and the characters, for the most part, were interesting. The character of Mazamette provided the most enjoyment for me, providing comic relief for the movie. I can't, however, say that it wasn't a chore to sit through this nearly seven hour film, because it was. Like I said, there were times when I just wanted to get on to the next movie, but I still had four hours of *Les Vampires* left to watch, so I couldn't.

I'm not sure whether this film is a must see before you die or not. I could really argue for both sides. On the one hand, if you don't see it, I really don't think you're missing a WHOLE LOT, and you're saving yourself from having to watch a very, very long film. On the other hand, if you do decide to check it out, I think you'll find, that for 1915, it's quite good and quite intriguing in most parts. So you make the call for yourself on this one...but don't say I didn't warn you about the length.

**RATING: 5.5/10** I couldn't decide between a five or a six, so I called it right down the middle.

First appeared at

<http://1001moviemanager.blogspot.com/2009/09/les-vampires-1915.html>

# UNREDEEMABLE RACISM: A REVIEW OF D.W. GRIFFITH'S BIRTH OF A NATION

*By Mac McCann*

While director D.W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* (1915) utilized revolutionary film techniques and influenced audiences nationwide, it is widely frowned upon today (and rightly so) for its grotesque racism. Lasting over three hours, the silent epic covers many personal, local, and national issues.

Griffith wanted the film to be viewed as not only historically accurate, but morally true as well. Not simply a reflection of the culture, he hoped the film would help shape American culture (and it did, unfortunately).

The fact that the movie is a silent black and white film (although forced upon them because of technology) reflects Griffith's view of America in more than one way. He attempts "to show the dark side of wrong, that we may illuminate the bright side of virtue," as the opening slides read. Absolute in his vicious racism, for Griffith, "the dark side of wrong" refers almost solely to African-Americans, whereas "the bright side of virtue" universally refers to white Americans - showing morality in 'black and white' terms, metaphorically and literally.

This goes back to the one of the very first text scenes, which read: "The bringing of the African to America planted the first seed of disunion."

While the various white characters are depicted both positively and negatively, blacks are universally shown in an extremely negative light. The Ku Klux Klan, which is especially glorified in the film, is depicted heroically in their all-white costumes, again emphasizing color differences.

In the opening slides, Griffith also references the Bible and Shakespeare, two staples of our culture, both then and now. Hoping to produce the film equivalent of those monumental works, Griffith



force,” as he said in an interview, especially because film was “the Laboring Man’s University.” The “Laboring Man” that Griffith hoped to influence directly contrasts with the film’s depiction of blacks, who are brutally depicted as lazy, stupid, violent, and immoral.

The film is also hugely influential for its technical and aesthetic cinematic achievements and some of the positive values it promoted (which, of course, by no means cancel out the film’s overwhelming prejudice).

For example, toward the beginning of the film, a peace-promoting text slide reads: “If in this work we have conveyed to the mind the ravages of war to the end that war may be held in abhorrence, this effort will not have been in vain.” This reflects Americans’ desire for peace, especially at that time.

Released in 1915, the film hit theaters during World War I while America was still neutral. In fact, American anti-war sentiment was so strong that President Woodrow Wilson, who supposedly praised the film as “history written with lightning,” campaigned for and won reelection in 1916 using the slogan “He kept us out of war.” (Unfortunately, he didn’t keep us out of war for long; the U.S. joined the war in April 1917.)

A slide during Civil War battle scenes, in which bodies are scattered throughout the battlefield, again shows an anti-war message: “War claims its bitter, useless sacrifice.”

Throughout the film, Griffith emphasizes the nation’s common humanity (but only for whites), the terror and ineffectiveness of war, a respect for Abraham Lincoln and Daniel Webster, and a respect for religion (with Biblical allusions throughout) – ideas that (for good or for bad) are still supported by many Americans to this day.

Regardless of its positive contributions, the previously mentioned early text scenes act as a preview and summary of the brutally racist film: D.W. Griffith’s *Birth of a Nation* aimed to be a powerful myth in American civil religion through its attempt to unite white Americans of all regions by mercilessly scapegoating African-Americans.

Still, *The Birth of a Nation* has its admirers. Until *Gone with the Wind* in 1939, it was the highest grossing film of all-time. The film is preserved in the National Film Registry after the U.S. Library of Congress deemed it “culturally, historically, or aesthetically significant” in 1992. Even famed critic Roger Ebert wrote, “*The Birth of a Nation* is not a bad film because it argues for evil. It is a great film that argues for evil.” In 1998, the American Film Institute even recognized it as the 44th best American film of all-time.

In the end, there are no terrific techniques that can redeem what it teaches, no industry innovations that can cover up its ignorant racism.



# FADE OUT:

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And silent film comes to an end... mostly.

With the release of *The Jazz Singer*, Talking pictures were all the rage. And why not? It was a novelty, much as any film had been at first, but it ended up as the dominant force in film.

There were significant holdouts, of course. Chaplin didn't make talking pictures until he made *The Great Dictator*. The Avant Garde film community embraced silence, with filmmakers actively choosing to make silent films (and one of the greatest complaints in the history of film was that many of the films being shown at the MoMA were silent "...so as not to disturb the party conversations.'). There have, at times, been attempts to make silent movies, and rarely have they done well. Well, until recently.

The era from 1920-1929 featured the most mature silent filmmaking, and the most daring as well. Films like *Napoleon* and *The Big Parade* provided some of the most impressive work done in the Silent era. Silent comedies were excellent, especially with the number of excellent comedians working at

the time. Small-time filmmakers started to play with the less expensive cameras and the results were impressive (*The Life and Death of 9413: A Hollywood Extra*) and some were less impressive but equally important (home movies from people like Groucha Marx come to mind).

In the end, this is the period that people who love Silents talk about when they talk about loving Silence. It's one of the most impressive eras in all of filmmaking, and film wouldn't reach the heights the 1920s reached until the death of the Studio System.

Also, for the first time ever, film was everywhere around the world. Films were made in large numbers in Asia, Africa, and South America for the first time ever.

# Jason Watches NAPOLEON With Live Orchestra And Polyvision



**Wow, wow, wow wow wow wow!**

Let's see, I can't get away with just repeating "wow" a thousand times for a blog post, can I?

Let me start by saying there are two more screenings, tomorrow (Saturday) and Sunday, March 31 and April 1. Get tickets if you can. If you can't, just go there early, beat someone up in line and steal his ticket. Wait, don't do that, I'm just kidding. But it would be worth it (including the jail time.)

Okay, so I got there and I had my normal seat, front row center. Actually, slightly off-center, as the center of the Paramount is an aisle. I should've brought a folding chair and actually sat in the center, but I was just to the right instead. I was about an arms length

away from Carl Davis conducting the Oakland East Bay Symphony, and that was pretty amazing. The orchestra was fantastic, and I suppose decorum should prevent me from mentioning the hot bassoonist I ogled occasionally. (To be fair, my unnamed friend ogled her more, and he was there with his girlfriend)

Let's get on with the movie, shall we? It's an amazing epic, the faster 5 1/2 hours I've ever spent, which is amazing because with three intermissions and a dinner break, it was actually 8 1/4 hours. The story opens with Napoleon as a little child, at school in France. He shows budding battlefield tactical expertise and an iron will as he leads his rag-tag army of only 10 children in a victorious snowball fight against an army of 40. Still, neither the students nor the teachers really respect him. His foes he vanquished on the field of snowy battle break in and release his beloved pet eagle. I really,





really want a pet eagle now. But not one I keep in a cage, one that flies free but returns to me at dramatically appropriate times!

As a grown man, he returns to his home in Corsica [Author's note: An earlier version said Sicily, which is because I'm an idiot who confuses islands...also, I'm perpetually drunk] where he finds the island is torn by political forces who want to align with England, Spain, Italy, or France. Napoleon, of course, is the champion of the French cause. He barely escapes the turmoil in Corsica, and joins the French army in the artillery. And then let me not get bogged down in details of the plot. We see his struggles and triumphs during the Revolution. The director Abel Gance appears as Saint-Just, the most feared figure of The Terror. Then a bunny shows up randomly. It was really weird to be sitting in the beautiful Paramount, watching such a great film, and then reflexively shout-whisper, "bunny!" and have my friends (who know my little bunny obsession) stifle their giggles. If anyone else heard that and was annoyed, I'm really really sorry. I just have a thing about bunnies.

Anyway, we see Napoleon almost sent to the guillotine (same for Josephine.) We see him go from that to becoming the hero of France. We see his obsession for Josephine. And we see him go off and conquer Italy. And that we see in Polyvision. Two side screens open up (there's a gasp and then cheer from the audience) and we see three synchronized projectors show the final 20 minutes in an amazing, awesome technical achievement that pre-dates Cinerama by a quarter century. And then, just to crown everything perfectly, his eagle returns once more! The end.

Oh yeah, it ends with his victory in Italy, none of the rest of his life. Nothing more of Josephine. No Elba. No Waterloo. Dammit, I want a sequel, this 5 1/2 hour movie wasn't long enough!

As a side note, I know a lot of people who say they'll wait and see it when it comes to Los Angeles or New York or...wherever else they are. I'd never say never, but I think I have about as much

of a chance of seeing zombie Abel Gance direct a sequel to Napoleon as you have of seeing this somewhere else. I know it's last-minute, but just get a ticket, fly the red-eye into OAK, and go see it. You won't regret it.

So that's the story, and I haven't even talked about the technical brilliance of the film, other than Polyvision and some hints about the recurring eagle. Well, here goes. Abel Gance's use of multiple exposures was masterful--all throughout the movie but particularly when the ghosts in parliament appear to Napoleon and plead with him to be the hero of France. Same with his rapid editing and early use of handheld cameras. Napoleon is cast perfectly, both as a child (Vladimir Roudenko) and an adult (Albert Dieudonné.) In particular, their iron-willed stares are excellent. My friends and eye ended up joking about "eagle-facing" each other during the dinner break.

Now, just a couple of hints for people who are planning to see it this weekend:

1. During the 20 minute intermissions, have a plan of action. You can go to the concession stand and get a drink and/or snack. Or you can buy a souvenir (poster, larger program guide) and maybe get it signed. Or you can go to the bathroom. You won't have time to do more than one, the lines will be too long.
2. Related, the concession stands to serve alcohol, and you are allowed to bring it back to your seat. So if you want to have a bit of bubbly to aid in the French-ness of the day, you can.
3. During the dinner break, have reservations at a nearby restaurant already. It might be too late, and all of them are booked now. We had reservations and it still took nearly an hour and a half to get there, order, eat, pay, and return to the theater. If we had to wait 20 minutes for a table somewhere, we would've been screwed.
4. Just enjoy. Don't be afraid of the long running time. Seriously, it's the quickest 5 1/2 hours of your life.



# THE GENERAL AND I By Rich Coad



The General (1926)

My first job, when I was fifteen, was at a Straw Hat Pizza in Oakland, CA. Surprisingly enough, the chain still exists today, and describes its modest beginnings as "... Straw Hat restaurants were modest but lively hangouts with hard bench seating, bright red carpets and flocked wallpaper, and they were a special place for people of all ages. Along with its unique menu and ice cold beer, each establishment featured old-time movies, free Charlie Horse rides for kids, and often showcased local banjo bands." For two dollars an hour, which is probably equivalent to 10 or 12 an hour today, I probably would have put up with local banjo bands -- after all I put up with a silly red and white striped shirt, a black string tie, and a cheap straw boater -- but I didn't have to. In 1972 there may have been no local banjo bands in Oakland.

Our branch did, however, feature old-time movies. These arrived every week from a mysterious distributor in Hollywood, or maybe Burbank, or possibly Hayward. A stack of half a dozen or so metal cylinders, each about a half inch deep and nearly two feet in diameter, contained the 16mm film we were to show for a week before returning them when the next shipment arrived. Oh yes, children, this was way before DVDs and even long before video cassettes battled out between Beta and VHS. If you wanted to see a film, you had to have honest-to-goodness, now hard-to-find, film, and if you wanted it to be seen you had to use a projector which could melt the film if the sprockets stuck -- creating an instant Fillmore (or Family Dog) style light show in black and white (unless you were tripping) that lasted mere instants but was indeed far out for

those moments. Old-time movies is, of course, a relative term. I'm sure there are many readers of THE DRINK TANK for whom the original NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET or even SCREAM are old-time movies. As a teenager in the early 70s my own old-time movies were mostly horror and sf movies from the 50s, which showed regularly on TV, with an occasional earlier Universal horror or a classy color flick like THE WIZARD OF OZ. The repertory houses, which showed classic movies like CASABLANCA or LITTLE CAESAR, were only just starting their spread at this time, so it wasn't that easy to see much in the way of movies that weren't either on TV or recently released (of course, this was the heyday of kung fu, blaxploitation, and eco-disaster films so the recent releases were well worth seeing). Anyway, I seem to have gotten a bit sidetracked. Where was I? Ah, yes, old-time movies appearing in weekly batches at Straw Hat Pizza. These were generally a mixed bag of Laurel and Hardy shorts, some cartoons, a B movie and a feature, with, perhaps, an old travelogue (sometimes vaguely racist) or sporting news (Babe Ruth and Jack Dempsey and Seabiscuit were popular topics). The films weren't all silent but with all the commotion in the restaurant, they may as well have been.

I may have seen my first Marx Brothers movie at Straw Hat. I definitely saw my first Buster Keaton movie there. One batch of movies contained a feature length silent movie called THE GENERAL. As with all of the movies that were shown at the restaurant, we staff saw it in a piecemeal fashion. A scene here of botched attempts to add water to the boiler of a locomotive, a scene there of a man under a table listening to the officers seated at the table discuss their plans. A disconsolate Johnnie, rejected from enlisting because of his value as a train engineer (listen up, James Bacon), sitting on the drive shafts of his beloved engine. A locomotive chase. Cannons! Trains forced on to dead-end

spurs! A bridge alight. The most expensive scene ever filmed!

A week went by. Each of us had our own particular favorite snippets from THE GENERAL. Tales circulated and staff said, "hell yeah, I gotta see that scene, too!" and THE GENERAL did not get returned with the other films. And time passed and it stayed in Oakland. For four weeks beyond its due date we kept that movie, until every one of us had seen the entire film in a completely different sequence. Before sending it back we had an after hours viewing that had us all enthralled from beginning to end. And if that is not a definition of genius, a film that can enthrall a motley crew of stoner high school students, and still enthrall over 40 years on, when the film is nearly 90 years old, well, if it's not genius it's a damned reasonable facsimile.



# Silent Masterpieces: The Penalty And The Passion Of Joan Of Arc By Chuck Serface

One evening during dinner, Chris Garcia asked me, “What’s your favorite silent film?” More than a few came to mind, such as those by the German Expressionists, *Pandora’s Box* starring Louise Brooks, and Sergei Eisenstein’s *Battleship Potemkin*. I replied, however, “*The Passion of Joan of Arc* . . . no, wait. *The Penalty* with Lon Chaney.” In fact,



both hold equal places in my heart, because both examine the human condition from different philosophical points of view. When Chris then revealed that he was planning the special issue on silent films that you’re reading now, I leapt at the chance to explain why I’m so in love with these two films. Let’s begin with *The Penalty*.

## THE PENALTY (1920)

[The Penalty on Archive.org](#)

**“Lon Chaney plays Blizzard, a deranged psychopath scarred by the childhood operation where a young doctor mistakingly amputated both of his legs. Hellbent on revenge Blizzard becomes a master criminal. This is one of Lon Chaney's most famous non-horror roles.”**



## The Penalty

The world remembers Lon Chaney as “The Man of a Thousand Faces,” and that reputation stems from more than just his role as a pioneer of cinematic makeup techniques. Chaney not only used makeup and applications, but he effected body-transforming contortions using various contraptions to alter his physical appearance and stature. His Quasimodo from *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* or Erik from *The Phantom of the Opera* come to mind for most. In 1920, however, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer released *The Penalty*, a crime yarn which many consider to be his breakout performance, directed by Wallace Worsley, with whom Chaney would collaborate later on *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*.

Charles Kenyon, Philip Lonergan, and Gueverneur Morris adapted the script from Morris’s novel of the same name. The story involves Blizzard, played by Chaney, a crime boss and double-amputee who during childhood lost his legs when Dr. Ferris, a surgeon fresh out of medical school, removed them unnecessarily. Ferris then lied to Blizzard and his parents in an attempt to hide his incompetence. But Blizzard had overheard an earlier conversation between Ferris and a colleague who encouraged this deception. Blizzard became embittered, and years later would develop into the underworld chief of the Barbary Coast region of San Francisco. It is at this juncture that Blizzard again encounters Dr. Ferris and his daughter, a sculptress, and plots his revenge while planning a citywide crime caper worthy of Dr. Mabuse, the evil mastermind from German cinema.

Of course, no computerized special effects existed to transform Chaney into a legless amputee, so he resorted to a system of belts and straps to pin his lower legs behind his body. He then fitted his knees into leather cuffs and wore oversized clothing to further mask these bodily manipulations. Viewers are stunned as Chaney leaps, climbs, and walks with the aid of crutches. How he endured having his legs tied in this manner for so long boggles, even if it has been reported widely that he suffered severe back strain while completing this project. With cosmetics and facial distortions, he adds the finishing touch to his evil caricature.

One watches *The Penalty* for Chaney’s performance, since several inconsistencies mar the plot. Nonetheless, I’m attracted not only to Chaney’s mastery, but to how this film stands as an example of early twentieth-century naturalism. Emile Zola first defined naturalism in literature as a philosophical attempt to study humankind and the laws that govern our behaviors. These laws are observable in the physical environment, and the overall hypothesis dictates that our behaviors originate not from any spiritual agency, but from earthly antecedents. Much literature of the era follows what became a movement of sorts, and novels in this vein are rife with undereducated or lower-class characters, pessimistic moods, and gritty settings, all concocted to “test” how we develop morally through our physical environments. Indeed, Frank Norris or Theodore Dreiser could have written the script for *The Penalty*, which ends with an exploration on the origins of Blizzard’s evil nature that has nothing to do with the shock of losing his legs and overhearing two doctors scheme to deceive him. In searching for revenge, Blizzard even maneuvers Barbara, Dr. Ferris’s daughter, into employing him as a model for what she hoped would stand as her most magnificent sculpture, “Satan after the Fall.” This implied comparison between Blizzard and Satan might invite viewers to conclude that some spiritual agency is afoot in the universe, one that played on Blizzard’s anger and bitterness to tempt him to the dark side, but no. The ending, even though easily perceived as Blizzard’s comeuppance, springs from nothing but earthly causes.

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## THE CRITERION CONTRAPTION ON The Passion of Joan of Arc

“I’ve watched this movie five or six times in the last few weeks, and I haven’t come close to plumbing its depths. It’s searing, harrowing, pick your adjective. I’ve been trying to describe the effect it had on me, the experience of watching it, and I don’t think I’m a good enough writer by half. So let’s stick to the facts.”



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### The Passion of Joan of Arc

I first encountered the Danish director Carl Theodor Dreyer through a friend madly in love with his work. *Vampyr* and *Ordet* ranked high in his estimation, but he simply raved about the silent opus that many have deemed not only his masterpiece, but one of the greatest masterpieces of all cinematic history, *The Passion of Joan of Arc*. “Unfortunately,” my friend informed me, “you can’t find a VHS or DVD copy of the version you should watch, Dreyer’s original, the one restored in 1985.” Lo and behold, in 1999 Criterion released a DVD featuring this very version, found in a Norwegian mental institution, where it had rested unseen by human eyes since its premiere in 1928 -- until 1981 when a worker stumbled on it in a closet! I’d never seen my friend more ecstatic. After purchasing my own copy and viewing it, I too immediately joined the hallelujah chorus.

Others have gone into great detail about the convoluted history of *The Passion of Joan of Arc* replete with angry French nationalists and Catholics looking to censor controversial materials, accidental fires at studios, Dreyer’s status as a non-Catholic, until finally there’s the gold at the end of a rainbow ending in a closet in a mental hospital in Oslo, Norway. The Criterion DVD includes a nice summary of this sad progression of events leading to a final event somewhat akin to the falling of manna from Heaven, and yet another reason for you to obtain that DVD. I dream that one day another like this Norwegian employee will come across a pristine copy of Lon Chaney’s *London after Midnight*. I’m not accepting bets, however.

As for the plot, most are familiar with the Maid of Orleans, the fifteenth-century peasant girl who led the French into battle against the English during the Hundred Years’ War. In 1430, English troops captured her and then turned her over for trial. Dreyer

begins his story here with a screenplay based on actual transcripts of Joan’s trial, conducted by French priests who were pro-English. Amazingly, Renee Jeanne Falconetti, the actress portraying the nineteen-year old Joan, was thirty-five at the time, but Falconetti’s performance compels us to easily overlook the difference. The actions mirrors passion stories told about the trial and execution of Christ, and through her eventual martyrdom Joan ascends to Christ-like status. Dreyer chooses to map this ascension through, of all elements, the faces of his actors.

Honestly, I can’t recall any film that so successfully relies on portraits to relate thematic content. Dreyer juxtaposes close-ups of Mlle. Falconetti, her eyes wide and filled with either fear or grace depending on the moment, with the venal scowls or derisive leers of the priests and jailers to emphasize the distinction between Joan’s true devotion and the corrupt nature of the Church. The actors wear no makeup. Often flies crawl across Joan’s face, or a tear falls along her cheek. The faces of her inquisitors -- caked with moles and carbuncles, crevices furrowed into their cheeks, and malicious light burning in their eyes -- tell more about betrayal and false piety than any lengthy tract by Luther or Calvin. Furthermore, Dreyer chose an austere setting that while convincingly medieval has minimal detail so as not to distract from the true center of this story, the faces of those experiencing it.

When the Criterion DVD reaches your hands, experience *The Passion of Joan of Arc* both with and without Richard Einhorn’s 1995 “Voices of Light” musical score. Einhorn incorporates several medieval components that wonderfully accentuate to movement of the film. However, watching without the score will allow you to focus more on the cinematography. This film is a master class in cinematography from the facial angles to the chief interrogator entering the room and blotting out the shadow of a cross formed from the sun shining through the lattice of a window. Although



## LOUDER THAN WAR ON THE PASSION OF JOAN OF ARC

The searing emotional intensity of Dreyer's masterwork has continued to inspire cutting edge artists through the decades. In his 1962 picture *Vivre Sa Vie*, Jean-Luc Godard cites Dreyer's close-ups of the martyrdom of Falconetti in shots taken from *The Passion of Joan of Arc*.


lost on few, the symbolism here strikes one as bold rather than blunt.

Both *The Penalty* and *The Passion of Joan of Arc* present audiences with debauched worlds and individuals. Both consist of plots and themes that investigate human nature. The differences lie in philosophical focus and outcomes. Both end in redemption, but the crafters of *The Penalty* envision this not so much as God's grace, but as biologically determined through what eventually happens to Blizzard medically and how this changes his nature. I won't reveal more details. You'll have to watch to see what I mean. *The Passion of Joan of Arc*, on the other hand, is all about spirituality, about how pure devotion to God can free us from the flesh. If only those pro-English priests had listened to God's message as told through Joan before it was too late! But it's not too late for you. Both these films await your attention.



# Neither A Chaplin Nor A Keaton Be

## by Chris Garcia



Hardcore Silent Comedy fans will often ask new folks a question - "Chaplin or Keaton?" I was asked once. At a party. In Hollywood. In a house that had been owned by Tom Mix. My answer - Harold Lloyd.

That's an easy answer for me, actually. Yeah, Chaplin's the better sentimentalist (and *The Circus* is a masterpiece), and Keaton's one of the best physical actors of the last century, with *Sherlock Jr.*, *Steamboat Bill, Jr.*, and *Cops* all being among the best American comedy films ever made. But as far as comedy goes, it's all about Harold Lloyd, and in particular the fact that he created three of the five best silent films ever.

Unquestionably, *Safety Last* is the finest comedy ever crafted. It's the only silent comedy I showed to Evelyn when she wasn't reading well that played for her. She got it, and she was nervous that our hero was going to fall off the building as he made his way to the top. The scene on the clock actually made her jump! And while that's the stuff that folks always point to, there is so much good stuff throughout the movie, notably Lloyd hiding in a coatrack that is carried into work as a way to get in late without does it without the detached

zombie-like stare. There's a lot of little comedy, and it never lets up. Lloyd was a much bigger stuntman than Keaton, but that's fine, because he puts out as much heart in his performances as Chaplin. Watch the love story in *Safety Last* and you'll see his heart come through. It's sappy, but adorable!

Now, *Safety Last* is just about the perfectly paced Silent film, but far from his only film of any significance. *The Freshman*, two years after *Safety Last*, is one of the first College comedies, and it's just about the perfect one. Glass, Lloyd's young go-getter character, is the new kid who decides to try and win popularity through playing on the College Football team. It features the most feel-good of all possible endings! It was a huge box office hit, but it was also considered to be Lloyd's best film. I disagree, but I do love it so very much.

The other Lloyd films of the 20s were great, including *Speedy*, which is completely constructed like a Chaplin. Harold's trying to save the last horse-drawn streetcar in New York. I managed to read a lot about it, but sadly, I've never seen it. It also has an appearance from Babe Ruth.

*Hot Water* has a great Haunted House sequence and is probably a level below those three, but is still really funny.

While both Chaplin and Keaton made some great shorts, no one was better at the short comedy than Harold Lloyd. His Lonesome Luke series of films for Pathe are among the best of their kind. He made a ton of them and I'll take them over *The Gold Rush* any day. *A Jazzed Honeymoon* and *Billy Blazes, esq.* are both fantastic, and I can remember talking to Forry Ackerman about *The Rajah*, which was directed by Hal Roach.

Let me also say that there were so many other silent comedians, like Charley Chase and Harry Langdon, but these three had the longest, and biggest money, careers. All of them found new life, largely because a greater percentage of their films have survived and can be featured. That fact has made the DVD sets great, and the Harold Lloyd set is AMAZING!



# First Impressions: King Vidor's *The Big Parade* (1925) By Cliff Aliperti

John Gilbert's been on my mind. With Turner Classic Movies set to run a nine movie Gilbert birthday marathon on Wednesday, I started my copy of *Dark Star*, the 1985 biography by his daughter, Leatrice Gilbert Fountain, on Tuesday. I'm dying to clickBuy on Eve Golden's new Gilbert biography, but I just can't bring myself to do so until I've read the earlier book that has been sitting on my bookshelf far too long.

I had planned to write about my favorite Gilbert talkie, *Gentleman's Fate* (1931), for Wednesday, but at the last moment chose to put that off for a later date. Instead I decided to write about my first impressions of King Vidor's *The Big Parade*, originally released by MGM in 1925. I watched this major silent film classic for the first time late Monday night.

And, after all, if I was going to write about it that meant I would have to watch it for a second time Tuesday so I could grab some images for this post. After spending daytime Tuesday recalling several moments I had enjoyed so much watching the night before, there was nothing I would rather do than create another opportunity to watch *The Big Parade*!

I enjoy the history around the First World War more than I do World War II. It's no slight against the Greatest Generation, which my grandparents were a part of. I grew up around that generation in their senior years, and sadly all those I knew from it are now gone. But I shared a common world with that group long enough



to hear the stories and not consider their past all that distant. Our worlds intersected; we even watched movies together. This was not the case for me with the previous generation. I had no direct relationship with any of them. Their time is only known to me through books and movies, a world just outside my reach of total understanding.

But people don't change all that much and as long as you can get over any silent film bugaboos you'll find much of what made *The Big Parade* work so well at the time of its original release does the same today. Love and war spring universal emotions and King Vidor captures them all in his sprawling tale of a time that was not so far removed when the film was originally released in November 1925.

We miss out on that. What must it have been like to see *The Big Parade* as a veteran of the War or as one who'd seen their father, husband, or brother serve, perhaps even been maimed or die, during that recent world calamity?

I'm sure many women attending wished they had been Renee Adoree, but how would a young woman in the crowd had felt if her personal history had more resembled that of the Claire Adams character? And what of the men who had fought and made it back? Did a faint smile cross their lips while watching the antics of John Gilbert, Karl Dane and Tom O'Brien? Did once forgotten dalliances

“Aren't you thrilled  
that we're going to  
war?”

cause them to flush at their wife's side as Gilbert romanced Adoree? And the battle, what might that possibly have done to them? Adrenaline surely spiked, but what emotions poured forth?

Thankfully, I had none of those concerns while watching *The Big Parade* unfold my first time. John Gilbert plays Jim Apperson, the spoiled, number two son of strict father (Hobart Bosworth) and doting mother (Claire McDowall). When War comes—and this reaction always seems so foreign—there is celebration. Young Apperson isn't celebrating though. He looks a little worried. At least until he is swept away by a patriotic parade that leads to his enlisting.

John Gilbert is quickly off to Europe. But it's going to be awhile before King Vidor brings us any battle.

The next hour of the film is spent allowing the viewer to embrace the Gilbert character, whose beginnings were a bit shaky for us. First he becomes friendly with Dane and O'Brien and then, more importantly, he falls in love with Renee Adoree's French girl, Melisande.

The language barrier makes this an especially cute courtship and this was probably intensified back in the mid-20s when silent film was the norm. Being so used to hearing voices, the silent Melisande

did not seem nearly as foreign to me as she certainly did to Apperson. We can't hear either of them and so Gilbert comes off as chatty as any silent lead while Adoree seems more mute than foreign. Still, their differences are accentuated and the romance works, soon magnificently. It grows throughout this hour and is punctuated by the famous chewing gum scene before building to Adoree's mad dash through the streets seeking out Gilbert amongst the other soldiers after he and the other men have finally been called off to battle.

While this is the first time I watched *The Big Parade* from start to finish, I had seen clips of this particular scene several times in various documentaries and so, again, from my retrospective view, while the men are being rounded up and begin marching off a little excitement built in me. Here it comes, I thought, the classic scene, the one I knew so well. But I had only known it off in space, on its own.

It would have been easy to be let down. It's happened before during similar experiences. Oh, is that it? or Wait, THAT was the climax? were thoughts that never occurred to me during my acquaintance with this scene in its correct context. Sure, it was the climax: of the first half of the movie. Tension only grows from this point as *The Big Parade* becomes a total war epic for the next 45 minutes.

MORDAUNT HALL'S  
ORIGINAL NEW YORK  
TIMES REVIEW  
NOV. 20, 1925

**“It is a subject so compelling and realistic that one feels impelled to approach a review of it with all the respect it deserves, for as a motion picture it is something beyond the fondest dreams of most people. The thunderous belching of guns follows on the heels of a delightful romance between a Yankee doughboy and a fascinating French farm girl. There are humor, sadness and love, and the suspense is maintained so well that blasé men last night actually were hoping that a German machine gun would not "get" one of the three buddies in this story.”**

Was that it? Well, if it was, it was everything: Gilbert loves Adoree and now we're fully invested in Gilbert. He's got to survive this damned war; he's got to get this girl back!

The battle scenes that follow are eerie, ferocious, heart-breaking and rousing, sometimes all at once. While Gilbert spouts occasional corn across the title cards once the men have advanced deep into battle, it was surely served fresh back during the original run of the film. Previously my favorite infantry battle scenes were from *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930) and as soon as Kirk Douglas blows his whistle in *Paths of Glory* (1957). Vidor's elaborately choreographed and shockingly brutal battle from *The Big Parade* now stands alongside them, if not out front.

Even before the mustard gas or the tense wait in the shell holes I was hooked. As the men make their initial march forward, spread just a few feet apart, the silence of *The Big Parade* is magnified. Why? Because we're in their boots now, the movie has totally captured us. Out of the corner of your eye you'll spot a soldier dropping to the ground dead and the death just doesn't stop. The slow determined march moves forward, the falling bodies becoming more prominent and our only hope becomes that Gilbert, Dane and O'Brien continue to stand and march.

I'll be honest. There were times during the first half of the movie, when Gilbert and Adoree were falling for each other, that I thought to myself, isn't this supposed to be a war movie? I was enjoying what I watched, but it wasn't what I had originally expected. I knew the importance of Adoree's involvement, but still, I came to the movie expecting war to be hell from start to finish. Our war finally comes, but it really begins just before that first battle when Adoree desperately seeks out the young American she has fallen in love with.

And that made my second viewing on Tuesday night all the more pleasant. *The Big Parade* gets better the second time. The power of what is to come still builds anticipation, but the story that leads us to the battlefield is improved both by knowing what does follow yet understanding just how much we will come to value these characters in reaching the hell that Vidor is about to put them through.

I watched *The Big Parade* nearly ninety years after it was first released. I suppose the best answer as to how it was received in the 1920s would be the bottom line. It became, arguably, the highest grossing film to that time and is still, along with *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), one of the two all-time highest grossing films of the silent era.

*The Big Parade* was originally released at 140 minutes in 1925 when it premiered at Grauman's Egyptian Theatre in Los Angeles. A few weeks later it premiered in New York at the Astor Theatre where it ran for a stunning two years! It only had limited release at that time and most of the country had to wait nearly two years for it to reach them during a September 1927 re-release.

The copy I viewed was recorded off of TCM from the 1988 restoration produced by David Gill and Kevin Brownlow. *The Big Parade* was previously released on VHS in 1992 and after yet another restoration in 2005 finally comes to Blu-ray and DVD from Turner Home Entertainment on October 1, 2013.

Third time should be even more the charm for me come this October.

# L For Laughs - Or - Amazing Acting By Chris Garcia



I had never seen *The Man Who Laughs*. Sure, I'd read about it, even had a chance to see it with the legendary Dennis James at the Console of the Stanford Theatre. Nope, never happened. My great appreciation for Conrad Veidt made this an untenable situation, and thus, with an assist from my good friend Chuck Serface, I finally saw *The Man Who Laughs*.

And all I could think about was *V for Vendetta*.

I hear the heads being scratched. A 2006 film about a terrorist based on a comic book from the 1980s has little to do with a 1928 film based on a 19th Century novel, right? Well, yeah, it doesn't, but the lead actor in both cases went beyond the screen giving a performance of such quality, they weren't allowed to use all their attributes.

In *The Man Who Laughs*, Conrad Veidt plays Gwynplaine, the heir to a noblemen who is put to death by King James. Gwynplaine is given to gypsies, and their doctor carves his face into a permanent smile. Yes, he looks like The Joker (and he's probably the inspiration for Batman's most hated villain), and thus he becomes a performer, *The Man Who Laughs*. Of course, he's a crying on the inside kind of clown. The film tells his story of trial, how he is separated from

his love, the blind Dea, who he has refused to marry because he fears that a man so ugly could not even marry a blind girl.

In *V for Vendetta*, Hugo Weaving plays V, a freedom fighter who is planning to blow up Parliament. He's horribly disfigured from a fire at the site where he was being experimented on.

The similarity? They are both acting with only portions of their being. You can't see Weaving's face at all, which means he only has the rest of his body to get across the emotions of his character. something simple like the way he offers a chair to his guest/prisoner Effy tells HUGE amounts of his love for her without the use of his face at all.

Veidt has it slightly easier. His mouth is in a permanent grin, which makes the world believe he is smiling at all times. Veidt played the character so well, most impressively by emoting through his eyes. At that point in Silent Film, the acting was still very broad, but there was still a subtlety to it that Veidt managed to tap into with his expressions. His mouth a grimacing mask for the anguish of his heart, and without a single change in anything but his eyes, he's a kind lover who is tending to his beloved Dea. The acting that Veidt does is incredible, and it is incredibly impressive to see acting that fluid in a Silent picture, but there it is.

The idea of the restrained actor having to make do with what they can use is not new, but these are two actors at the height of their craft using every one of their other tools to give a performance that is both moving and terrifying. And there's no secret that these are two frightening figures, especially Gwynplaine, who has been disfigured in such a way that no one can tell what true emotion he is feeling. Somehow, Veidt managed to bring that to us.

# The Life And Death Of 9413: A Hollywood Extra - A Review By Nathanael C Hood

Directed by Robert Florey and Slavko Vorkapić

1928

The United States of America



What does it take to create a great film? Trained actors, expensive sets, impossible special effects? Does a director need three assistants, the cameraman three grips, and the actors personal hairdressers? Could it be that we have trained ourselves to believe that films can only measure up to the sum of their parts? To think so would be foolish. For decades filmmakers have proven that great pieces of art can be made on minuscule budgets.

How many big budget Hollywood directors started their careers by making cheap horror films with their friends in their local woods? How many independent films have been created thanks to the dissemination of cheap camera equipment and film stock? In this age of digital video and Youtube, it is easier than ever for amateurs to get their cinematic visions made. But what about the time when the cinema was still in its infancy? Filmmakers like Griffith and DeMille didn't have Super-8 film or PixelVision cameras. Murnau and Lang didn't have access to Final Cut Pro. But that didn't stop young filmmakers from making bold, brash, and innovative films. One need only look at the phenomenal *The Life and Death of 9413: A Hollywood Extra* to see that even in the cinema's youth filmmakers were not limited by their budgets, but by their imaginations.

Made in 1928, it had a budget of \$96 (adjusted for inflation, that's \$1191.33). Sources say that the money was divvied up as such: Film Negative, \$25 (\$310.24), Store Props, \$3 (\$27.23), Development and Printing, \$55 (\$682.54), Transportation, etc, \$14 (\$173.74). The sets were made of toys and cardboard buildings that were projected like shadows.

Paper cut outs and spare film stock litter the background to create a thriving metropolis. Notice that the expenses of the film didn't include actors' salaries. That is because the actors weren't immediately paid, but compensated with benefits that they could claim at a later date. Quite simply, *The Life and Death of 9413: A Hollywood Extra* was one of the thriftiest film productions in early cinema history.

From this tiny budget came one of the most challenging and stinging indictments of the Hollywood production system in history. The story begins simply enough: a man goes to Hollywood with the hopes of becoming a movie star. The man (played by John Jones) travels to the desk of the appropriately named Mr. Almighty, the Hollywood producer. He presents Mr. Almighty with a letter of recommendation. However, Mr. Almighty callously dismisses him after writing the number 9413 on his forehead. The number be-

comes his identity. As he joins the ranks of other Hollywood extras, he notices that they also have numbers. He meets #13, a pretty female extra. He also meets #15, a handsome man who eventually becomes a star.

We watch #15's escalation to stardom in a curious sequence of scenes where he puts on a number of different masks. Each mask has a different facial expression on it. Eventually, it becomes apparent that the masks represent his ability to act and adopt different personas. #9413 approaches #15 and shows him his own mask. It is a flimsily made piece of paper and doesn't live up to the standard of #15's stately plastic masks. #9413 is spurned and forced out as #15 begins a terrible downward spiral beset upon him by his crushing popularity.

But we don't have much time to focus on #15's plight. The film is, after all, about #9413. As he moves from audition to audition, he becomes more and more depressed by his failures. In one of the film's most inventive scenes, we see a montage of #9413 trying to climb a flight of stairs. But each time he almost makes it to the top, a jump cut deposits him back at the bottom. A modern Sisyphus, #9413 is doomed to be denied his beloved prize. Having lost his identity and money to failure and bill collectors, #9413 succumbs and dies. He ascends to heaven (with the aid of several paper cutouts and a long piece of string) whereupon he meets an angel. The heavenly specter wipes the number from #9413's head, restoring the humanity that was stolen from him in Hollywood.

“

Despite its short length (it only clocks in at about 13 minutes) and almost nonexistent budget, *The Life and Death of 9413: A Hollywood Extra* is a miracle of early filmmaking. In many ways, its frugality was its greatest strength. The cardboard sets and paper cutouts make the film seem reminiscent of German Expressionism and the French avant-garde. Much of the film's beauty comes from the masterful cinematography designed by co-director Slavko Vorkapić. Vorkapić, who would become most well known for his montage work in such films as *David Copperfield* (1935) and *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939), had a true eye for filming special effects. As an audience weaned on CGI and high tech special effects, Vorkapić's cutouts and projections are easy for us to identify. And yet, they have aged so well that we don't mind that they look fake.

But the true genius behind the film is director Robert Florey. Beginning his career as an assistant to Louis Feuillade (director of the infamous *Les Vampires* serial) and as an assistant director to Jose von Sternberg, Florey was one of the most diverse directors in early Hollywood history. He would helm as director the first Marx Brothers movie *The Cocoanuts* (1929), several low budget horror films such as the Bela Lugosi scream-fest *Murders in the Rue Morgue* (1932), and the film noir *The Crooked Way* (1949). He was even chosen to direct 1931's *Frankenstein* before it was reassigned to James Whale. Florey demonstrated his considerable skill before it was fully developed in *The Life and Death of 9413: A Hollywood Extra*. Much like his later films, it is dominated by a moody, and often tragic, atmosphere that permeates each shot. What we are presented with is a cinematic vision of a life wasted, of potential extinguished, of dreams shattered.



## FROM THE AMERICAN SOCIETY OF CINEMATOGRAPHERS

“The most distinguishing hallmarks of the film are the intricate German Expressionistic cityscapes created by Vorkapich. They bear strong resemblances to Lotte Reiniger’s cutout silhouettes in her animated films, as well as to models in Fritz Lang’s *Metropolis*, but created on a much leaner budget. Much of the kinetic feel of the cityscapes is purported to have been done by swinging a bare light bulb behind a translucent screen, creating the illusion of movement and dancing shadows.”

Truly, *The Life and Death of 9413: A Hollywood Extra* was a labor of love. A tale of great tragedy and redemption, it has become even more relevant in today’s society that so eagerly embraces the cult of celebrity. While no-talent hacks are paid millions of dollars a film just to stand around and look pretty, real professionals, real artists, struggle everyday to make ends meet so they can achieve their dreams. *The Life and Death of 9413: A Hollywood Extra* is a tribute and a memorial to those who will never achieve their goals thanks to a cruel and unforgiving system. But it also serves as a beacon of hope for those who wish to pursue careers in filmmaking. Just as Vorkapić and Florey created a masterpiece with only \$96, *The Life and Death of 9413: A Hollywood Extra* beckons new generations of artists to get out there and create with all they’ve got.



# What's My Favorite Silent Movie?

## Silent Movie By Mel Brooks

### An Appreciation By Will Frank

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OK, I'm biased, because as far as I'm concerned Mel Brooks is the one plus ultra of comedy, but really.

A quick recap of the plot:

The film stars Mel Brooks, along with Marty Feldman and Dom DeLuise, and a dozen celebrity cameos. Mel Funn (Brooks), Dom Bell (DeLuise), and Marty Eggs (Feldman) are a film director and his assistants, who want to make a silent picture; the chief (Sid Caesar) of Big Picture Studios (Paramount Pictures), facing a takeover threat by the conglomerate Engulf & Devour (Gulf+Western Industries), thinks it's crazy until Brooks--I mean, Funn--offers to recruit the biggest stars in Hollywood.

So they get Burt Reynolds (Burt Reynolds), James Caan (James Caan), Liza Minnelli (Liza Minnelli), Anne Bancroft (Mrs. Mel Brooks), and Paul Newman (Robert Redford--sorry, habit)...but Marcel Marceau (Marcel Marceau) turns them down: "Non!" (Spoken aloud.)

Hold on, I think I got lost. Where does the movie end and the actual history of conglomerates buying film studios start? I haven't been this confused since I watched *Inception* and *Primer* at the same time.

I haven't even gotten to the part where E&D sends Vilma Kaplan (Bernadette Peters), the classic vamp, to ruin Funn. But anyway.

Mel had already done the whole "spoof a genre" bit with *Blazing Saddles* and *Young Frankenstein*, and he went back to his roots on this one; not only did he spend his early career writing for Sid Caesar's groundbreaking *Your Show of Shows* (including plenty of slapstick and silent sequences), but as a child born in the '20s, he grew up watching Buster Keaton and Charlie Chaplin.

As a result, *Silent Movie* is a slapsticky gem, filled with puns (including musical; the musicians accidentally playing "San Francisco" to open a scene in New York, then quickly correct themselves), pratfalls (a whole sequence with a drunk Funn facing a Murphy bed), Pong on an EKG monitor, and especially, inevitability. Probably my favorite joke in the film is when an exterminator's car (complete with giant fake fly bolted to the roof) crashes, and the fly goes (ahem) flying off and lands on a table in a restaurant, right in front of a man (Henry Youngman, no less!) who's enjoying a bowl of soup.

I don't care whether you've seen the movie or not, you know what the line is.

"Waiter...there's a fly in my soup."

You see it coming for miles, you can't do anything about it, and when it hits, it hits like a pie to the face. (Which, yes, also happens. But then, we'd already seen a full on Grand Pie Fight in *Blazing Saddles*, so Brooks doesn't quite go to that well again.)

That's *Silent Movie* and Mel Brooks in general for you. Inevitable humor, delivered without subtlety or apology. Just groans.

And come on. It's a silent movie with one word of audible dialog...spoken in French...by the world's most famous mime.

What's not to love?



# Silents All These Years By Chris Garcia

Most folks believe that once the Talkies arrived, the Silents died, buried until unearthed by Michael Mazanavicius to make *The Artist*. This is actually not the case, and some excellent Silent Films have been made in the years since Jolson sang *Swanee*.

First off, there's Chaplin. The guy resisted making talking pictures until he made *The Great Dictator*. Two of his most beloved films, *Modern Times* and *City Lights*, were made after *The Jazz Singer*. *City Lights* is probably the third best Chaplin film, and one of the few I enjoy, and *Modern Times* is his Science Fiction film.

Murnau made a couple of silents in the 1930s - *City Girl* and *Tabu*. Neither is among his best work, but they are both very interesting. Ozu, one of the best of all Japanese directors, made the wonderful *I Was Born, But...* in 1932, and two years later made *A Story of Floating Weeds*. A significant number of silents were made in the 30s in Russia, China, Japan, India, and Spain, and I'm sure elsewhere as well.

It was in the realm of the Avant Garde that silence remained golden.

Perhaps it is the freedom of knowing that no matter what you do, you ain't gonna be making money that freed filmmakers from having to worry about being what the audience seemed to want. *The Life and Death of 9413: A Hollywood Extra* and Luis Buñuel's *Un Chien Andalou* both came out at the very tail end of the silent era, in 1928 and 1929 respec-



tively. These spawned a massive number of avant garde films over the next 50 years. Joseph Cornell, looking at the number of silent films on Avant Garde compilations like the *Treasures* double-DVD set, and you'll see the importance.

Filmmakers have been paying homage to the Silents more and more the last decade or so. Yes, you had *Silent Movie* and *Les Vacances de Monsieur Hulot* by Jacques Tati and *Tuvalu* in 1990, but it really wasn't until 2001 or so that you started to see more and more silent-ish films pop up. Guy Maddin did a silent-style short, followed by *A Brand Upon The Brain*. The HP Lovecraft Historical Society produced *The Call of Cthulhu*, arguably the best Silent made after the end of the Silents. While music, and I think sound effects, exist on the print, the acting and the intertitles are EXACTLY what I'd have expected had it been released in 1926. I am desperate to see two films of the fantastic that are largely silents. The first, the Japanese *Sanguivorous*, is a vampire film. The second, Spain's *Blancanieves*, is a dramatic fantasy.

There have been a lot of films about the Silent Era, and I'd include *The Artist* in that category. Yes, it's largely a Silent, has intertitles and the like, but also it's got sound effects and music. I've watched it without the sound on and it's still very good, and followable, and would LOVE to see it with Dennis James at the console.

I haven't seen *Silent Life* (about the life and death of Rudolph Valentino) or *Right There*, but I am making plans to complete my Silent Education!

# Biographies!

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Vanessa Applegate - Artist, artisan, and editor, somehow she put up with Chris watching all these damned silent movies! She makes hairpieces and hats that you will find at [whiskeytangofashion.com](http://whiskeytangofashion.com)

James Bacon - a Hugo-winning Fanzine Editor. Chris has just sent him a thumbdrive with a dozen pieces of silent news-reel footage from WWI.

Christopher J Garcia - Lives in Boulder Creek, California, sees silents a few times a year, and edits fanzines.

Forgotten movie stars and obscure old movies are the focus of Cliff Aliperti's blog, [Immortal Ephemera.com](http://ImmortalEphemera.com). Established in 2002 as a base for Cliff's online movie collectibles business, Immortal Ephemera has expanded over the years into a site concentrating upon movies and stars of the 1930s, especially those whose stories have been too long neglected.

Rich Coad is a writer and editor out of Northern California. His zine Sense of Wonder Stories, really is worth checking out. It's available at <http://efanzines.com/SoWS/index.htm>

Andrew Duvall is one of the best film experience writers you'll ever find! He's watching his way through 1001 Greatest Movies Ever! You can read his film thoughts at <http://1001movieman.blogspot.com>

Will Frank is an exceptionally funny human being and a nice guy... despite being a lawyer.

Rachael Grace is an amazing filmmaker out of New York. Her film Sumi was a big hit at Cinequest in 2014.

Nathanael C Hood does [Forgotten Classics of Yesterday](http://ForgottenClassicsOfYesterday) which is always worth reading. His piece first appeared at <http://forgottenclassicsofyesteryear.blogspot.com/2010/07/life-and-death-of-9413-hollywood-extra.html>

Fritzi Kramer is a writer whose work can be read at <http://moviessilently.com>. His piece first appeared at <http://moviessilently.com/2013/11/03/the-great-train-robbery-1903-a-silent-film-review/>. He also maintains [vimeo.com/moviessilently](http://vimeo.com/moviessilently)

Mac McCann is a writer and student at the University of Texas. <http://macmccanntx.com/>. His piece first appeared at <http://macmccanntx.com/2013/02/01/unredeemable-racism-a-review-of-d-w-griffiths-birth-of-a-nation/>

Chuck Serface is the King of Men and co-host of the Nerdvana Podcast (<http://nerdvanapodcast.com>)

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