

THE SILENT TREATMENT

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RESCUING THE HITCHCOCK NINE BFI MOUNTS PUBLIC CAMPAIGN

By Robin Millard (Excerpt 8/2010)

BERKHAMSTED. Examining buckled film reels under a microscope, technicians pore over each precious original frame of Alfred Hitchcock's early movies as Britain bids to salvage the master's magic.



The **British Film Institute** is undertaking a mammoth project to restore Hitchcock's silent movies to their former glory. In a painstaking process, they are cleaning up and restoring his first films, creating a perfect-as-possible digital version to thrill audiences again. The BFI reckons viewers will be stunned by their clarity. Hitchcock is renowned as one of the greatest ever movie directors, thanks to masterpieces like *Vertigo* (1958) and *Psycho* (1960).

Long before his Hollywood career, Hitchcock made his name in British silent cinema, with cleverly-crafted black & white tales of suspense and mystery, honing the trade-

marks cherished in later classics. However, those fragile 1920s film reels will only deteriorate further and the BFI wants to revive them in digital form before it is too late.

The institute is restoring the nine films at its archive base in Berkhamsted, northwest of London. The former farm contains immense vaults, where some 200,000 film reels stacked to the ceiling are stored at five degrees Celsius in a cavernous 12-metre high building. The project will cost one million pounds, paid for by donations. Besides Britain, money has come in from China, Saudi Arabia, France and the United States.

While nine silent Hitchcocks are being worked on, one is missing. An appeal has gone out for *The Mountain Eagle* (1926), the BFI's most-wanted film. No known copies exist of the final jigsaw piece in understanding how Hitchcock developed his extraordinary visual technique.



The Mountain Eagle

The Hitchcock restorations are "probably the most significant project the BFI has undertaken," Brian Robinson, the archive's spokesman,

said. "The picture quality with digital technology is now giving us an astonishing leap from damaged materials. We can now create something that is really beautiful..." (Full article: www.google.com/hostednews/afpl/article/ALeqM5id9vJ8prrga1xXoXWKOf-niKXMyQ)



THE SPANISH DANCER:

PRESERVATION UNDERWAY

THE NETHERLANDS. The EYE Film Institute in Amsterdam has announced the plans of a full scale preservation and reconstruction of the extravagant Paramount feature *The Spanish Dancer* (1923) starring the feisty European import, Ms. Pola Negri, one the studios greatest stars of the 1920s.

After international research and comparing six prints in various languages, EYE has determined that no one holds the full length version of this production, which according to the American Film Institute, should be nine reels long with a total running time of around ninety minutes. Based on the original continuity script courtesy of the Margaret Her-

rick Library (AMPAS), EYE will now attempt to reconstruct the film to its original length using their own tinted nitrate print elements as the foundation of the project, plus the combination of three different prints from external resources to carry out a full length restoration.



The Spanish Dancer, based on the play **Don César de Bazan** by Adolphe d' Ennery and P.F.P. Du-manoir, was designed to be Pola Negri's first American spectacle with Paramount spending upwards of two million dollars on lavish sets and costumes. The film was placed in the fastidious hands of director Herbert Brenon and features a cast of top tier talent such as Wallace Berry, Antonio Moreno, and Kathlyn Williams under the guidance of future award-winning cinematographer James Wong Howe. The EYE aims to debut the new reconstruction at their Biennale Film Festival in 2012. (www.eyefilm.nl)

SILENT CRIME SPREE

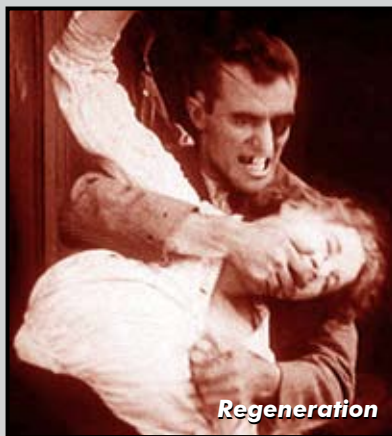
Mondays in October

WASHINGTON. Seattle Theatre Group (STG) and Northwest Film Forum (NWFF) present *Trader Joe's Silent Movie Mondays* this October at The Paramount Theatre in Seattle. The fall film series, **Silent Crime Spree**, is accompanied by live music on the Mighty Wurlitzer Organ (installed March 1928)—one of the last

three remaining organs of its kind to reside in its original environment.

Silent Crime Spree has crooked cops, double-dealing mistresses, and high-tension jewel thieves with perfect crimes that go perfectly wrong. All four films, *A Cottage on Dartmoor* (1929) on Oct. 4th, *Beggars of Life* (1928), Oct. 11th, *Underworld* (1927) October 18th, and *Regeneration* (1915) on October 25th, were produced before censorship and the restrictive Hays Code, showing a time when criminals were more important than the enforcers of the law.

Though the street toughs of yesteryear have largely vanished in the modern-day millionaire's playground of our big cities, these silents capture the imagination in a way that the new breed of criminal—from Wall Street execs to smalltime fund managers—never could. The films featured in **Silent Crime Spree** display a fascination for the mechanics and motivations of crime, with—of course—plenty of dark and devilishly handsome men and swooning ladies.



STG remains committed to showcasing these rare treasures in the way they were originally shown, and each film will be accompanied by acclaimed organist Jim Riggs. (www.stgpresents.org)

The Marie Dressler Foundation's VINTAGE FILM FESTIVAL

October 29th - 31st

CANADA. The Marie Dressler Foundation (established 1989) raised around \$400,000 to buy and restore the house where the comedienne is believed to have been born and now houses the Marie Dressler Museum.



Marie Dressler

Following the restoration project, the Foundation convened a committee to organize a festival of Marie Dressler films to show the community why Dressler occupies a unique place in film history. **The Vintage Film Festival**, held every year on the last weekend of October, always features one film starring Ms. Dressler, but others range from silents to talkies and musicals. The Festival's opening night takes place in Cobourg's Historic Victoria Hall and continues on into the weekend at the Capitol Theatre in Port Hope.

The silent films running at this year's festival include *Tillie Wakes Up* (1917) with Ms. Dressler (in her third outing as Tillie Tinkelpaw) as an unhappy wife who decides to team up with a henpecked neighbor

on a series of misadventures during a visit to Coney Island. Next is the horror classic *Nosferatu* (1922), in which a young real estate agent is dispatched by his employer to meet Count Orlock, who soon turns his attention to the agent's pretty wife and sets off a series of terrifying events. Finally, *The Grub-Stake* (1923) with Nell Shipman as Faith Diggs, a beautiful young woman who is duped by a gambler with promises of a false marriage. (www.vintagefilmfestival.ca)

BERNHARDT ON BROADWAY

World Premiere at Maxim's

CHICAGO. **Maxim's: The Nancy Goldberg International Center** and the Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs will present the world premiere of **Bernhardt on Broadway**, a one-woman musical about Sarah Bernhardt, who was arguably the most famous actress who ever lived. Set in the 1890s at the height of her career, the show is the story of the world's first superstar, the daughter of a Jewish courtesan who overcame countless obstacles and formed her own theater company, and traveled the globe performing to sold out crowds.



Sarah Bernhardt

Bernhardt will be portrayed by Carol Dunitz, who wrote the script,

music and lyrics for **Bernhardt on Broadway**. Dunitz read over eighty books about Bernhardt and her times in English and French, as well as countless articles and reviews before starting work on the project. "All my research enabled me to develop a very clear picture of Sarah Bernhardt and the demons that drove her to persist against all odds," Dunitz said.

In the show, Bernhardt addresses the audience in a relaxed and forthright manner, talking and singing about her present life and reminiscing about her past, both personal and professional. Twelve songs seamlessly contribute to the story as it unfolds. Dunitz is accompanied by Phil Pennington who also produced the arrangements for the **Bernhardt on Broadway** CD. The show premieres on **September 23rd** and will run every Thursday evening until **October 28th, 2010**. (www.maximschicago.org, www.bernhardtonbroadway.org)

KING OF THE MOVIES

Lubin Doc in Development

In 1882, an Eastern European Jewish immigrant arrived in Philadelphia with a leather case full of eyeglasses which he peddled on the streets. Thirty-five years later, he was the head of America's first film empire, producing movies that were distributed all over the world. At the height of his career in 1914, **Sigmund Lubin** was America's first movie mogul, living a lavish lifestyle. When he died nine years later, he was impoverished and forgotten.

The King of The Movies is a full-length documentary feature film currently in development on the life and work of America's first movie mogul. A tale of a complex vision-

ary and entrepreneur who commercialized the early movie industry and gave Sam Goldwyn, Cecil B. DeMille and the Warner Brothers their first big breaks.



The documentary will be based on the book *Lubin: The King of Movies* by Joe Eckhardt, professor of film history at Montgomery County College near Philadelphia, PA. Through nearly 30 years of research, Eckhardt has collected 35 of Lubin's films and located others in various collections. To learn more about the documentary, its filmmakers, or to support the completion of the project please visit www.kingofthemovies.com

BOOK CORNER

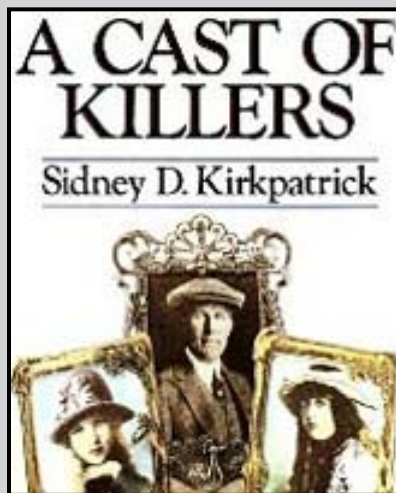
A CAST OF KILLERS: 20th Anniversary Edition

On February 1, 1922, the distinguished silent-film director William Desmond Taylor was shot to death in his Los Angeles bungalow by an unknown assailant. Reports of strange activities at the scene of the crime circulated soon after. Despite a full-scale investigation, the case was never solved and remained a lingering Hollywood scandal.

In 1967, director King Vidor, whose credits include *Northwest Passage*, *The Fountainhead*, *Duel*

in the Sun, and *War and Peace*, was determined to solve the mystery which haunted him throughout his career in order to make a film about it. Through his intimate knowledge of both the studios and the stars he succeeded where dozens of professional detectives had failed.

His findings were so explosive, he decided it could never go public and locked the evidence away. After Vidor's death in 1982, Sidney D. Kirkpatrick, Vidor's authorized biographer, gained access to the evidence and reconstructed the amazing story of Taylor's murder and Vidor's investigation. This tale of true crime has all the elements of a classic murder mystery told in riveting and shocking detail. (www.amazon.com)



ON DVD

FANTÔMAS

Based on the phenomenally popular French pulp novellas, Louis Feuillade's outrageous, ambitious *FANTÔMAS* series became the gold standard of espionage serials in pre-WWI Europe.

René Navarre stars as the criminal



lord of Paris, the master of disguise, the creeping assassin in black: Fantômas. Over the course of five feature films: *Shadow of the Guillotine* (1913); *Juve vs. Fantômas* (1913); *The Murderous Corpse* (1913); *Fantômas vs. Fantômas* (1914); and *The False Magistrate* (1914), Fantômas, along with his accomplices and mistresses, are pursued by the equally resourceful Inspector Juve (Edmund Bréon) and his friend, journalist Jérôme Fandor (Georges Melchior).

DVD extras include audio commentaries by film historian David Kalat; two rare Feuillade films *The Nativity* (1910) and *The Dwarf* (1912); and a ten-minute documentary, *Louis Feuillade: Master of Many Forms*. (www.kino.com)

CHICAGO

Like the musical *Chicago* that won the Best Picture Academy Award and five other Oscars in 2002, this original 1927 version descends from a 1926 hit Broadway play by Maurine Watkins. It's a terrifically entertaining mix of humor and melodrama as well as a pungent critique

of trash journalism. Frank Urson signed *Chicago* as director, although it is substantially the work of Cecil B. DeMille and his A-list technical staff (DeMille apparently judged it unseemly to take full credit for this cynical and secular story while his religious spectacle *The King of Kings* was still in theatres).

Chicago is silent filmmaking at its peak, with an outstanding score for this edition by the Mont Alto Motion Picture Orchestra. The 1927 *Chicago* was long believed a lost film, but a perfect print survived in Cecil B. DeMille's private collection. (www.flickeralley.com)



MOMENTS IN SILENCE

October 30, 1925 – Comedian Max Linder commits suicide

October 31, 1912 – Landmark gangster pic *The Musketeers of Pig Alley* premieres

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