

THE SILENT TREATMENT

ALL THE NEWS FIT TO HEAR • VOLUME 05 • NUMBER 06 • NOV/DEC 2011

NAPOLEON STORMS AMERICA IN 2012



The San Francisco Silent Film Festival recently electrified the film world with the news that it will present the U.S. premiere of Abel Gance's legendary *Napoleon* (1927) in its complete restoration by Academy Award®-winning historian, documentarian and archivist Kevin Brownlow, in four special screenings at Oakland's Paramount Theatre on March 24, 25, 31 and April 1, 2012.

All four exclusive performances will be accompanied by maestro Carl Davis conducting the Oakland East Bay symphony in the U.S. premiere of his renowned orchestral score. The presentations at the spectacular 3,000-seat, art deco Oakland Paramount will be climaxed by its finale in "Polyvision"—an enormous triptych simultaneously projected on three full-sized screens employing specially-installed synchronized 35mm projectors.

The festival audience cheered

as Brownlow made the announcement from the Castro Theatre stage in July. The culmination of a life's work, this third of Brownlow's restorations is the most complete version of Gance's epic, and has never before been screened in North America.



His first restoration caused a sensation when it was screened at the Telluride Film Festival in 1979, and an abbreviated version was presented to great acclaim at Radio City Music Hall and other venues in the U.S. and around the world in the early 1980s.

This latest restoration reclaims more than 30 minutes of additional footage and visually upgrades much of the film, and unlike the prior restorations, features the original color tinting and toning reproduced using the traditional dye-bath techniques.

No version of *Napoleon* has been screened theatrically in the U.S. with live orchestra for nearly 30 years, and there are no plans to repeat the event in any other American city. Brownlow also noted that there are no plans to release the film on Blu-Ray or DVD.

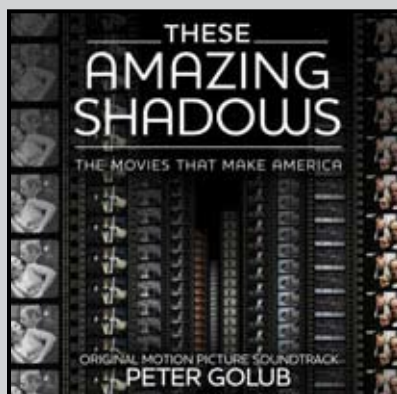
Each screening of the 5 1/2-hour epic will begin in the afternoon and will be shown in four parts with three intermissions, including a dinner break. Tickets and additional information can be found on the SFSFF web site: www.silentfilm.org

THESE AMAZING SHADOWS

PBS Premiere: December 29th

What do the films *Casablanca*, *Blazing Saddles* and *West Side Story* have in common? Besides being popular, they have also been deemed "culturally, historically or aesthetically significant" by the Library of Congress and listed in **The National Film Registry**, a roll call of American cinema treasures that reflects the diversity of film, and indeed, the American experience itself.

The current list of 550 films on The National Film Registry includes selections from every genre: documentaries, home movies, Hollywood classics, avant-garde, newsreels and silent films. Making its broadcast premiere on PBS December 29th, 2011, **These Amazing Shadows** is an 88-minute documentary rich with imagery; interweaving clips from America's most-beloved films (and many rare treasures) with personal tales of how specific films have reflected our culture and changed lives.



The documentary includes interviews with the Librarian of Congress, famed directors as Christopher Nolan, John Lasseter, Amy Heckerling, and John Waters; producers, archivists, admired actors, and members of the National Film Preservation Board.

Shot on HD and imparting a warm film look, **These Amazing Shadows** explores the cultural impact and historical significance of American films while revealing how American cinema truly is our “family album.” (www.theseamazingshadows.com)

A CHRISTMAS CAROL: THE SILENT BAH-HUMBUG

CHICAGO. 'Tis the season for various renderings of “A Christmas Carol” by Charles Dickens; and so it must be that the **Silent Theatre**

Company is trying their hand in it. Not for reasons much different than others—it is a tale of redemption, which finds its way to the heart and warms it as it lifts the spirit.

As creators who are interested in the shared human experience, the STC is enticed by the words of Dickens: it is the only time of year “when men and women seem by one consent to open their shut-up hearts freely, and to think of people below them as if they really were fellow-passengers to the grave, and not another race of creatures bound on other journeys.” Drawing inspiration from this timeless story is the STC’s own effort to dig up ol’ Miser Scrooge and resurrect him through an original stage adaptation.

The aesthetic of *A Christmas Carol: the silent bah-humbug* in performance from November 25th – December 30th, employs aspects of Cantastoria, Art Nouveau, Grand Guignol and German Expressionism. Sound tracked by live musical accompaniment by composer Isaiah Robinson, the grim side of this tale reaches the audience on a visceral level. Monochromatic costumes and make-up blanket the dreary gray world of Ebenezer Scrooge and stark lighting chills the air resulting in a production that is meant to scare as much as inspire. (*For more info and tickets visit: www.silenttheatre.com*)



THE LAUREL & HARDY PRESERVATION PROJECT AT UCLA

In 1914, Hal Roach began his career as an independent comedy film producer, creating memorable series built around star names like Harold Lloyd, Our Gang, Charley Chase, Will Rogers, Thelma Todd, Harry Langdon, and Laurel & Hardy. Anyone who has seen their work is likely to agree on the importance of preserving these films for future generations to discover, study and enjoy.



One of the ironies of film preservation is that it’s often the most popular titles that are most in need of restoration, and this is certainly true of the work of the universally beloved comic duo of Laurel & Hardy, whose films have been used, reused and overused to the point of severe attrition.

The **UCLA Film & Television Archive** retains the best surviving nitrate on many Laurel & Hardy titles and has launched a multi-year project to restore these films to their original glory. The preservation effort was inaugurated in 1988 by showing two rare and restored 1930 Laurel & Hardy Spanish language shorts, *La Vida Nocturna* (Blotto) and *Politiquerias* (Chickens Come Home) in the first-ever **UCLA Festival of Preservation**.

Today, thanks to the generosity of Mr. Jeff Joseph, a major lead gift has already been pledged for the proj-

ect and the archive is now soliciting donations large and small from anyone and everyone all over the world who wants to make a contribution to propagating the spirit and genius of Laurel & Hardy, so that the films will survive and continue to entertain as many future generations as possible. To find out more or donate to the project please visit www.cinema.ucla.edu/support/laurel-and-hardy

SILENT SPOTLIGHT

RAYMOND GRIFFITH: Silk Hat Comedian

By Bruce Calvert (excerpted article)

Raymond Griffith's screen character was markedly different from any other leading comedian of his time: his costume was usually a top hat and tuxedo, and his characters usually found themselves in a situation where he had to try to figure out how to save his hide.

Raymond was born into a theatrical family on January 23, 1895 in Boston, Massachusetts. According to his official 1927 Paramount biography, he was fifteen months old when he made his stage debut, playing a baby in his parents' stage company.

Griffith's cousin Jeanette Swift revealed that he contracted respiratory diphtheria as a child. Although virtually unknown in the western world today, if untreated, this disease can be fatal or cause paralysis. In Griffith's case, diphtheria permanently damaged his vocal chords.

His film career started in 1915 when he appeared in L-KO comedies before leaving for Mack Sennett's studios at Triangle. There he appeared in five comedy shorts, usually in supporting roles.

Frustrated, he left Sennett's studio for a short time and appeared in one comedy for Fox, *An Aerial Joy Ride* (1917). Griffith soon returned to the Sennett lot, but he had a difficult

time convincing Sennett to put him in a short comedy. Griffith started paying a studio janitor ten cents to laugh at him whenever Mack was around; Sennett was not fooled by the ruse, but he was impressed that Griffith was sly enough to try it.

In 1922, Griffith moved to Marshall Neilan's independent studio where *Fools First* (1922) was the first of several crime melodramas that would feature Griffith as a supporting player. The next year, Clarence Badger directed him in *Red Lights* (1923), a semi-serious mystery film. Badger was another Sennett alumnus who would later direct two of Griffith's finest comedies.



In 1924, Griffith began working as a Paramount contract supporting-player, but had a knack for stealing the movie from its "bigger" stars. In *Changing Husbands* (1924) he plays the befuddled boyfriend of Leatrice Joy, who played a dual role as a bored wife who changes places with a look-alike actress. In *Open All Night* (1924), he supports Adolphe Menjou and Gale Henry as the "next movie sheik" – a parody of Rudolph Valentino. Griffith steals the movie as a drunk with comedy scenes every few minutes.

Paths to Paradise (1925) was his first big hit as a comedian. In



this tightly plotted comedy-mystery, Griffith is paired with Betty Compson as con artists who try to steal a big diamond from both its owner and then each other. But it is *Hands Up!* (1925) that is touted by most critics to be Griffith's best film. He plays a Southern spy during the Civil War who tries to divert a gold shipment that the North desperately needs.

In late 1925, Griffith started having problems working with Paramount; several starring films were announced to the press but were never filmed and he decided to break his contract with the studio in 1927.

Griffith broke into sound comedies in 1929 at Al Christie's studio where he signed a contract to make a dozen two-reelers, but only two (*Post Mortems* and *The Sleeping Porch*) were actually filmed.

His final film role turned out to be his best-remembered one. In Lewis Milestone's *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930) he played Gerard Duval, a French soldier in the foxhole. In a poignant scene, he is killed by Lew Ayres' character Paul Baumer. As Duval lays dying, Baumer realizes the horror of the war. Griffith's wordless cameo performance was a highlight of the movie.

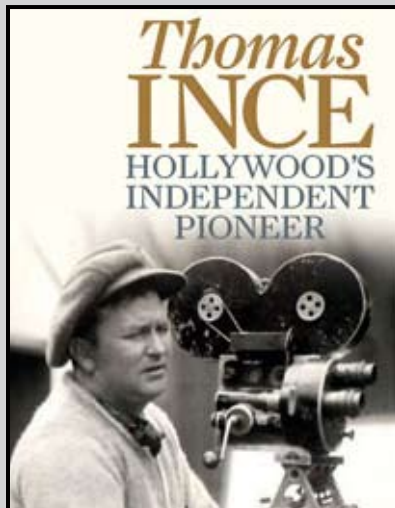
On the evening of November 25th, 1957, while having dinner with two friends at the Masquers Club, Raymond Griffith choked on his food and died. He is buried at Forest Lawn Memorial Park in Glendale, California. (Full article at: www.silentfilmstillarchive.com/raymond.htm)

BOOK CORNER

THOMAS INCE:

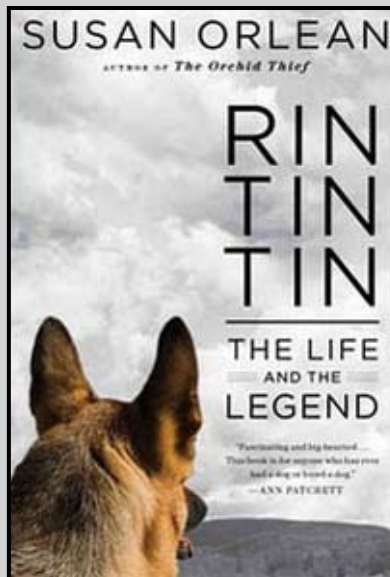
Hollywood's Independent Pioneer

Thomas H. Ince turned movie-making into a business enterprise. Progressing from actor to director and screenwriter, he revolutionized the motion picture industry through developing the role of the producer. In addition to building the first major Hollywood studio facility, dubbed "Inceville," he was responsible for more than 800 films.



Thomas Ince: Hollywood's Independent Pioneer chronicles Ince's life from the vaudeville stage to his sudden death as he was about to join forces with media tycoon William Randolph Hearst's International Film Corporation. Author Brian Taves explores Ince's impact on Hollywood's production system, the Western genre, and his creation of movies starring Asian performers and the status of women in society.

Until now, Thomas Ince has not been the subject of a biography. This book offers a glimpse into the world of silent cinema through the story of one of its earliest and most influential moguls. (www.kentuckypress.com)



RIN TIN TIN:

The Life and the Legend

Susan Orlean's sweeping, powerfully moving account of Rin Tin Tin begins on a battlefield in France during World War I, when a young American soldier, Lee Duncan, discovered a newborn German shepherd in the ruins of a bombed-out dog kennel. To Duncan, who came of age in an orphanage, the dog's survival was a miracle. Duncan brought Rinty home to California, where the dog's athleticism and acting ability drew the attention of Warner Bros. Over the next ten years, Rinty starred in twenty-three blockbuster silent films that saved the studio from bankruptcy and made him the most famous dog in the world. At the height of his popularity, Rin Tin Tin was Hollywood's number one box office star.

At its core, **Rin Tin Tin** is a poignant exploration of the enduring bond between humans and animals. It is also a richly textured history of twentieth-century entertainment and entrepreneurship that's filled with humor and heart. (www.simonandschuster.com)

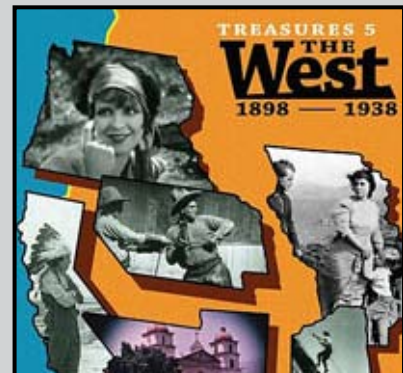
ON DVD

TREASURES 5:

The West 1898-1938

Before *High Noon*, *Unforgiven*, and *True Grit*, there was a wilder, wider West on film. **Treasures 5: The West, 1898-1938**, is a 10-hour presentation celebrating the dynamic, gender-bending, ethnically diverse West that flourished in early movies but has never been seen before on DVD.

In this latest edition of the award-winning series from the NFPF, **Treasures 5** showcases the open terrain of the first Westerns, as well as educational films, newsreel stories, travelogues, historical reenactments, and government promotional films of the era. The 40 films come from America's major early film collections and the New Zealand Film Archive.



All films have audio commentary, newly recorded music, supplemental program notes, and interactive screens covering each film. (www.filmpreservation.org)

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