

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

NEWS RELEASE

FOURTH STREET AT CONSTITUTION AVENUE NW WASHINGTON DC 20565 • 737-4215/842-6353

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
June 20, 1994

CONTACT: Tina Coplan
(202) 842-6353

LEGENDARY SILENT FILMS WITH LIVE MUSIC

BEGIN SECOND SEASON AT NATIONAL GALLERY, JULY 2, 1994

Washington, D.C. -- *Grand Music Cinema II: 1920-1928*, a series of five silent films with historically authentic live music accompaniment, will be featured free of charge in July on Saturdays at 3:00 p.m. in the National Gallery of Art's East Building auditorium. This second summer series of classic silent films includes three Washington premieres of original scores and three films with ten-piece orchestral accompaniment.

Music for all films again this year is under the direction of Gillian Anderson, music specialist for the Library of Congress. Seating is on a first-come, first-served basis. Free same-day passes will be available at the auditorium entrance beginning at noon, with a limit of four per person. The series is made possible by The Circle of the National Gallery of Art.

Three films showcase actress Lillian Gish's legendary silent film artistry: *Orphans of the Storm*, *Way Down East*, and *La Bohème*. Also featured are Charlie Chaplin's seldom seen *The Circus*, as well as *The Covered Wagon*, the first epic Western filmed outside of a studio on location in the Snake River Valley.

"This highly entertaining program offers a rare chance to see beautiful prints of silent films as they were originally experienced," said Earl A. Powell III, National Gallery director.

"These screenings reunite the films -- played at the proper speeds -- with the live

-more-

silent films . . . page two

accompaniments that their producers intended for performances at the best movie houses."

The series opens on July 2 with *Orphans of the Storm* (1921), D.W. Griffith's tale of two orphaned girls (Dorothy and Lillian Gish) in revolutionary Paris. Its story crosses Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities* with Adolphe d'Ennery's *The Two Orphans*. The Washington premiere of the film's original musical accompaniment, composed and arranged by William Frederick Peters and Louis Ferdinand Gottschalk, will be performed by pianist Christine Niehaus.

On July 9, a ten-piece orchestra will recreate the original musical arrangement for Charlie Chaplin's *The Circus* (1928), a delightful pasticcio of popular, operatic, and classical melodies compiled by Arthur Kay under Chaplin's supervision. The score displays the wide musical knowledge of Chaplin and Kay as well as their exceptional flair for marrying image and sound.

The orchestral music for D.W. Griffith's *Way Down East* (1920), premiering in Washington on July 16, is another mélange of popular and classical motifs from ragtime pieces, nineteenth-century American songs such as "In the Gloaming," and classical works including Liszt's *Les Préludes*, and Wagner's overture to *The Flying Dutchman*. One of Lillian Gish's most memorable performances in a moving narrative of rural American life, the film climaxes with the famous scene of the heroine collapsing on an ice floe heading rapidly downriver toward a falls.

James Cruze's *The Covered Wagon* (1923), an epic portrayal of pioneers on the Oregon Trail, will be shown on July 23. Both singers and orchestra will perform the

-more-

silent films . . . page three

original score by Mortimer Wilson and Hugo Riesenfeld. These film maestros, like William Axt, the composer for the final program *La Bohème*, were classically trained in Europe.

Shown on July 30, *La Bohème* (1926), directed by King Vidor, stars Lillian Gish and silent film matinée idol John Gilbert. The tragic tale of bohemian life in Paris was based on Henri Murger's *Life in the Latin Quarter*, the same novel that inspired the Giacomo Puccini opera. The Washington premiere of Axt's original score will feature a singer, pianist, and commentary on the differences between the opera and the film's music.

Conductor Gillian Anderson has participated in the research, restoration, and reconstruction of the original orchestral accompaniments for seventeen silent films. She has conducted live performances at major film festivals and with symphony orchestras in the United States, Canada, Europe, and South America. She is author of *Music for Silent Films (1898-1929): A Guide*.

Pianist Christine Niehaus is artist in residence at the College of William and Mary. She has performed in concert in St. Petersburg, New York, and at the White House, as well as playing for silent films at festivals in Paris, New York, and Rome and Pordenone, Italy.

PROGRAM SCHEDULE

Orphans of the Storm (1921)	July 2, 3:00 p.m.
The Circus (1928)	July 9, 3:00 p.m.
Way Down East (1920)	July 16, 3:00 p.m.
The Covered Wagon (1923)	July 23, 3:00 p.m.
La Bohème (1926)	July 30, 3:00 p.m.

#####