

## RECOVERED TREASURES: GREAT FILMS FROM WORLD ARCHIVES

January 15–February 20, 2011

### ***THE MONT ALTO MOTION PICTURE ORCHESTRA ACCOMPANIES L'ARGENT***

Saturday, January 22, 7:30 p.m.

Sunday, January 23, 2:00 p.m.

Restored 35mm print from Archives français du film—CNC

Presented with assistance from the Cultural Services of the French Embassy, NY

#### ***L'Argent***

(1928, 180 mins. with intermission)

Directed by Marcel L'Herbier. Written by L'Herbier and Arthur Bernède, adapted from the novel by Émile Zola.

Production design by André Barsacq and Lazare Meerson. Photographed by Louis Berte, Jules Kruger, and Jean Letort. Costume design by Jacques Manuel.

Principal cast: Brigitte Helm (as La baronne Sandorf), Alfred Abel (Alphonse Gundermann), Marie Glory (Line Hamelin), Yvette Guilbert (La Méchain), Pierre Alcover (Nicolas Saccard), Henry Victor (Jacques Hamelin).

From review by Ginette Vincendau, *Sight and Sound*, January 2009:

*L'Argent*, adapted from the 1891 novel by Emile Zola, is set in the 1920s banking milieu. An ambivalent critique of capitalism, it details the battle for supremacy between banker Nicolas Saccard, a larger-than-life character played by Pierre Alcover, and his nemesis, the refined Alphonse Gunderman (the men's physical and stylistic differences can also be read as a covert French-Jewish commentary). Caught in Saccard's ruthless financial games is aviator hero Jacques Hamelin and his pretty wife Line (Mary Glory), whom Saccard desires. Also part of the equation is the glamorous Baroness Sandorf (Brigitte Helm), who plays Saccard against Gunderman, though like them she is really after money. The narrative in this long, two-part film works—like the stock exchange

—on a cyclical pattern of rises and falls, while the 'moral' ending, in which Saccard is sent to jail, is immediately undermined by his plotting with the jail guard. *L'Argent* is a clear case of a film in which visual style and performance strongly work in tension with narrative: the 'good' characters (the Hamelins) are dull and gullible, while the camera can't get enough of the 'bad' Saccard, who fills the screen with his massive body, wit and energy, or of the scheming Baroness Sandorf—Brigitte Helm (from *Metropolis*) posturing in fabulous art deco costumes.

*L'Argent* is justifiably famous for its location shooting in the Paris stock exchange, but also for the way in which it is shot. The film is a riot of mobile camerawork, with truly dizzying shots, for example with the camera dangling from the high ceiling in wide sweeping movements, giving a

sense of the stock exchange as a mad zoo, and of the feverish excitement animating the men and women in it. *L'Argent* is deeply gripped by modernity—the modernity of travel and communication (transatlantic flights, telephones, typewriters, messages sent down pneumatically propelled tubes), the modernity of design (women's clothes, grandiose interior decoration,

Silent films were generally released without musical scores, and it was up to each local theater to create the musical setting. This could range from a player piano in small theaters to a 70-piece orchestra in the big city movie palaces. The Mont Alto Motion Picture Orchestra recreates the sound and scoring techniques of an "orchestra" from a small- to medium-sized theater of the 1920s.

Using a library of music once belonging to theater music directors, we select a piece of music for each major scene in the film. This means that the music you will hear comes from a variety of different composers, ranging from the familiar (Dvorak, Grieg, and Friml) to the long-forgotten (J.S. Zamecnik, Gaston Borch, and Ted Fiorito), all in special editions re-arranged for theater orchestras. Our main theme for *L'Argent* is the Herod Overture, by the American composer Henry Hadley. So, although today's musical score is not one of the scores used in 1928 (which are lost to history), it is a score compiled in the same way from the same repertoire of music, and is therefore a score that could have been heard in 1928.

It is known that at the premiere of *L'Argent*, L'Herbier played 78-rpm recordings of airplane engines during the sequence leading up to the trans-Atlantic flight attempt. We've taken that as a cue to score several of the scenes using only percussion and sound effects, enlarging our usual five-piece orchestra with a three-member pit crew. If you have any questions about this film, this score, or historic and modern silent film scoring practices, feel free to stay for a question-and-answer session after the film.

The Mont Alto Motion Picture Orchestra has recorded 30 silent film scores for DVD releases, and has recordings available at this show and at their web site, [www.mont-alto.com](http://www.mont-alto.com).

jazz-age tap dancing) and the modernity of the city itself, as for instance in the view of the Place de l'Opéra at night during Saccard's first party.

### **The Mont Alto Orchestra:**

**Rodney Sauer**, pianist and score compiler, studied at the Oberlin Conservatory and has appeared as piano soloist with the Boulder Sinfonia. He is an avid student of silent film music, and his article on the history and use of "photoplay music" was published in the American Music Research Center Journal. He is a frequent performer in various dance genres from early American ballroom dance to folk dance, and also plays solo improvised silent film scores, although the Mont Alto Orchestra is his major musical endeavor. In 2001 he won a Musical grant from the Arts and Humanities Assembly of Boulder.

Violinist **Britt Swenson** received her Bachelor's and Master's degrees from the Juilliard School in New York. A frequent performer, she has soloed at Carnegie Hall with the New York Pops Orchestra as well as giving numerous recitals including one at Carnegie's Weill Hall to benefit the Northern Lights Organization Children's Fund which benefits children born with HIV and AIDS. Britt has been heard on NPR's Music from the Grand Teton Music Festival where she performed with Lionel Party, harpsichordist from the New York Philharmonic.

**David Short**, cello, received his Bachelor's in Music from Ithaca College. He has recorded several projects around Colorado, including the documentary *The Greatest Good* and Denver Center Theater's production of *Plainsong*. A member of the Fort Collins and Cheyenne Symphonies, David performs regularly up and down the Front Range, also substituting with the Boulder Philharmonic and Longmont Symphony

**Brian Collins** is principal clarinetist with the Longmont Symphony Orchestra, and performs with the Colorado Mahler Festival. He has also performed with the Tulsa Symphony Orchestra, Boulder Philharmonic, Boulder Sinfonia, Louisville Symphony, Denver Symphony, Boulder Concert Band, and too many other orchestras to count.

**Dawn Kramer**, trumpet, graduated from the University of Colorado, and plays with a number of Colorado dance, latin, and jazz bands. She is a teacher at the Rocky Mountain Center for Musical Arts, and has toured world-wide in various genres.

**Kate Polera**, percussion, is a Philadelphia-based musician and lawyer who majored in percussion at the University of Pennsylvania.

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