

## Lost British silent masterpiece rediscovered in Holland



Betty Balfour as Tiny Toes in *Love, Life and Laughter* (1923)

**Embargo-ed until 00.001hrs 3rd April 2014.** The BFI is pleased to report the discovery by EYE, the Dutch Film Museum, of a lost masterpiece of British silent cinema, George Pearson's *Love, Life and Laughter* (1923), starring Betty Balfour, Britain's "Queen of Happiness" who was the most successful British actress of the 1920s, known also as Britain's answer to Mary Pickford. It is one of the most wanted on the BFI's list of 75 films published to mark the BFI National Archive's 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2010. Only one other complete film by Pearson survives which makes this a particularly significant discovery.

The film was recently discovered in the archives of EYE, while being catalogued following its arrival at the archive in November 2012. The print is part of a collection of film cans that belonged to a local cinema in the small town of Hatterem (near Zwolle). Cinema Theater De Vries, run by the De Vries family had only been active for 3 years, from 1929 – 1932. In 2012, when the cinema building was about to be redeveloped, an employee at a local television station took the initiative of bringing the material to EYE. No-one had any idea of the contents of the film cans and their discoverer Mr. Van der Worp had actually hoped they would contain some historical footage of the region before the Second World War.

Bryony Dixon, curator, Silent Film, BFI National Archive said, "This is a major discovery featuring Betty Balfour, the biggest female star of the silent period. It is also a rare survival of the work of George Pearson, one of Britain's most talented directors of this time whose

First World War drama *Reveille* is another film on the BFI's most wanted list. Contemporary reviewers and audiences considered *Love, Life and Laughter* to be one of the finest creations of British cinema, it will be thrilling to find out if they're right! We hope to be able to acquire some material from our colleagues at EYE soon so that British audiences can have a chance to see this exciting discovery."

Betty Balfour was best known as the comic character Squibs, in a hugely popular series of films, also directed by George Pearson through the 1920s. She was much in demand as a popular foreign export and worked with leading directors in Germany, Austria and France (including the great Marcel L'Herbier). She stars in Hitchcock's 1928 silent, *Champagne* as a memorable heiress and had a supporting role alongside Jessie Matthews in *Evergreen* (1934). Born in London in 1903 she died in Weybridge in 1978.

Contemporary press reports hailed the film as a triumph, a screen classic and a masterpiece. For the *Daily Telegraph* the film was "destined in all probability to take its place among the screen classics", while the *Manchester Guardian* considered it "certainly the most ambitious [of Pearson's films], spectacular at times, lit and photographed with a beauty to dream of," concluding, "devotees have called it George Pearson's masterpiece, and so it is".

The film was released in the UK in June 1923. It premiered in the Netherlands on Oct 12, 1923, at the famous Amsterdam Tuschinski theater. Reflecting the immense popularity of Balfour's Squibs character among the Dutch audiences, the Dutch release title was *Squibs als Tip-toes; De Koningin van de Music-halls* (*Squibs as Tip-Toes; the queen of the music-halls*). The print is with Dutch intertitles, and beautifully tinted and toned.

*The Times* praised Balfour as "the cleverest comedienne playing in British films", while the *Evening News* predicted, "what few people there are who have not fallen beneath the spell of her pretty face, clever comedy, and sympathetic interpretation of human feelings must surely be captured now." *Topical Times* labelled her "a genius" who could "beat Mary Pickford at her own game" .

Pearson's skill as a director and script writer was likened to that of Dickens (whom he admired) for his ability to wring the maximum amount of emotion out of a story. *Love, Life and Laughter* is the story of Tip-Toes (Balfour), a chorus girl in a garret who befriends a lonely young boy who dreams of being a writer, while she dreams of being a music-hall star. They agree to meet at midnight in two years' time in their slum tenement to see which of their dreams has come true.

## Credits

Director	George Pearson
Production Company	Welsh, Pearson and Company
Producer	George Pearson

Script	George Pearson
Photography	Percy Strong
Night Photography	A. H. Blake
Effects	Charles Penley

Cast: Betty Balfour (Tip Toes), Harry Jonas (The Boy), Frank Stanmore (The Balloon-blower); Annie Esmond (his wife), Nancy Price (Her friend), Eric Smith (Charlie), Sydney Fairbrother (Lily)

6,290 feet, silent, black & white

A selection of images for press use are available via [www.image.net](http://www.image.net) filed under BFI/BFI National Archive/Love Life and Laughter.



### Images

From BFI National Archive





From BFI Special Collections

<p>ALL ENQUIRIES for BOOKING</p> <p>"<i>Love, Life &amp; Laughter</i>"</p> <p>AND ALL SUBSEQUENT PRODUCTIONS OF</p> <p>Messrs. WELSH, PEARSON &amp; Co., Ltd.</p> <p>SHOULD BE ADDRESSED TO THE SOLE DISTRIBUTORS</p> <p><i>The Gaumont Company, Ltd.</i> 6, DENMAN STREET, LONDON, W. 1.</p> <p>AND BRANCHES.</p>  <p>A COMPLETE SYNOPSIS and EXPLOITATION CAMPAIGN BOOKLET WILL BE AVAILABLE SHORTLY.</p> <p>MORTON, BURT &amp; SONS, Ltd., Printers, Bayswater, W.2.</p>	<p>Welsh, Pearson &amp; Co., Ltd. PRESENT</p> <p>BETTY BALFOUR</p>  <p>in "LOVE, LIFE AND LAUGHTER"</p>
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<p>Welsh, Pearson &amp; Co., Ltd. present</p> <p>"LOVE, LIFE &amp; LAUGHTER"</p> <p>The STORY of TIP-TOES</p> <p><i>A Screen Tale. Preceded by "Love, Life and Laughter," a specially arranged overture</i></p> <p>PRODUCTION BY GEORGE PEARSON</p> <p>Assisted by . LESLIE HISCOTT Photographed by PERCY STRONG London Night Photography by A. H. BLAKE, M.A.</p> <p>Dresses by <i>Madame Eleanor, Queen's Road, Bayswater and Messrs. Nathan</i></p> <p>Presentation Effects by CHARLES PENLEY</p> <p><u>Length . Six Reels, 6,300 feet</u></p> <p>SOLE DISTRIBUTORS <i>The Gaumont Company, Ltd.</i></p>	<p>THE PERSONS OF THE TALE IN THE ORDER of THEIR APPEARANCE</p> <p>Tip-Toes: A Chorus girl . . . BETTY BALFOUR The Boy: An Idealist . . . HARRY JONAS The Balloon Blower: An Optimist: FRANK STANMORE His Wife: A Martyr . . . ANNIE ESMOND Her Female Friend: A Gossip . . . NANCY PRICE Charlie: Hot on Love Songs . . . ERIC SMITH Lily-of-the-Valley: A fallen Star: SYDNEY FAIRBROTHER The Old Musician: A Friend HARDING STEERMAN His Daughter: A Woman . . . AUDREY RIDGWELL The Rich Man: A Gentleman GORDON HOPKIRK The Dancer . . . DACIA     &amp;c., &amp;c.</p> <p><i>The Story is but a simple exposition of the oldest, yet ever youngest desire of the human heart, the achievement of an earnest ambition. The incidents tell in picture form of the striving of a boy and girl, themselves symbolical of every boy and girl, against the odds of the world. The portrayal of this struggle towards a final goal of desired happiness is unconventional in treatment. The Boy and Girl laugh and weep, succeed and fail, move onward and forward to an inevitable destiny, and to a climax which should live long in the memory</i></p> <p>Period . . . . . To-day or Any Day. Place . . . . . London or Any Great City.</p>
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A. C. & F. C. BROMHEAD present

# Betty Balfour in "Love, Life, and Laughter"

A WELSH-PEARSON PRODUCTION

Directed by GEORGE FEARSON

Sole Distributors . The GAUMONT CO., Ltd.



A. C. & F. C. BROMHEAD  
 presents  
**BETTY BALFOUR**  
 IN THE WELSH-PEARSON FILM  
**"LOVE, LIFE & LAUGHTER"**  
 THE STORY OF TIP-TOES  
 A SCREEN TALE  
 Produced by **GEORGE FEARSON**  
 Assisted by **LESLIE BISCOY**  
 Photographed by **FERCY STROGO**  
 London. Night Photography by  
**A. G. BLAKE, M.A.**  
 Screenplay by  
**Madame Edmond, Queen's Road, Battersea**  
 and **G. MASON, Merton**  
 SOLE DISTRIBUTORS:  
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 Ltd.

"The 'open of young people in the air in ballroom. The more 'open the 'open you give. 'You much 'open-'open!"

"How beautiful in youth, how bright it shines. 'Beauty, 'Beauty, 'Beauty, 'Beauty. 'Each said it better, each was a 'beast!"

### The Story

**T**HERE was once a happy little chorus girl who lived alone in a garret; and there was a lonely boy in the attic above who wrote tales nobody wanted—except perhaps the girl. One day, he started to write the strange story of their two lives. It was easy to begin, for he just took facts and clothed them with fancy. Most stories are made that way. On the cover of the manuscript, he wrote "The Tale of Tip-Toes and These Who Loved Her."

The story was finished long afterwards, though the later writing seemed different—but the author's hand may have tired. Prep for continuity at the last pages, with their strange tale of the girl's room.

... as the last stroke of midnight died away the two frightened women in that attic in the slum, looked out between the broken laths of the venetian blind which covered a rear, splashed, shut-laden window and they talked in whispers.

What were they waiting for? What were they talking about? We will tell you. Two years ago, Tip-Toes, the little chorus girl, had gone away and for two years she had kept up her payments for her room. To night she was coming back. Her life, they said, had been like a fairy tale. And

"Why do you always write of 'open-'open?"

"If you're not a 'open-'open."

Then she took him to find laughter.

"Is that the story? Why, it's all about us!"

she had ordered a banquet to be served in that attic of hers upstairs at midnight. . . .

In a silent room in a far corner of that great city, another waited with anxiety the appointed hour. He heard the chimes . . . he picked up a packet on which was written, "September 23rd. An hour after midnight," and he started out for the guest where Tip-Toes had once lived. . . .

The tale was long enough—the end can wait. . . . the tale was long the boy's romance of those around him. Leave imagination and look at life—as the real people as they were living when he started his story.

The tenement caretaker, who lived below Tip-Toes, was a model pair; the husband was a balloon-seller who never tried camera tricks with his wife, and whose rough philosophy was expressed in the life of his balloons—"The more 'open, the higher you goes. 'Too much 'open-'open."

His wife's life was mainly made up of impertinently interesting herself in the friendship of the author and the chorus girl. With feminine instinct she felt sure that Tip-Toes was "giving him on." As for Tip-Toes, she conversed discreetly with the author on the stairs, confiding that she was going to be a big music-hall star one day; and he returned the compliments by confessing that he would go on writing down stories that publishers might want in the end.

And always Tip-Toes argued that he should write of laughter and not of tears which nobody wanted to read about. She even took him out into the highways and byways to show him that the poor knew how to live and be happy.

Then some day, indeed, and find the author among them.

Tip-Toes—the Queen of Happiness.

Late Night—The Triumph of Tip-Toes.

