

SHIRAZ: A ROMANCE OF INDIA

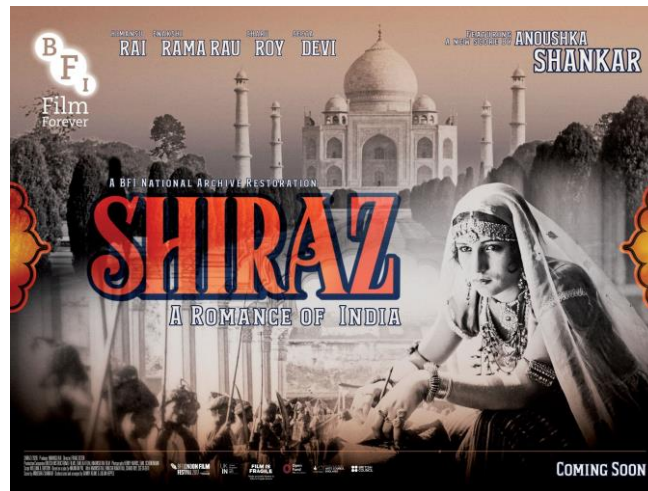
Directed by Franz Osten

UK-Germany-India / 1928 / 105 mins / Cert TBC

A BFI National Archive Restoration

With Himansu Rai, Enakshi Rama Rau, Charu Roy, Seeta Devi

Featuring a specially commissioned score by Anoushka Shankar



Opening at BFI Southbank and selected cinemas UK-wide from 2 February 2018

21 December 2017 – Following the sold out world premiere gala screening at the 61st BFI London Film Festival (LFF) in October, and with sold out screenings in four cities in India in November, the epic 1928 silent film **Shiraz: A Romance of India**, opens UK-wide on **2 February 2018**. The film has been meticulously restored by the BFI National Archive and has a specially commissioned new score by multi Grammy-nominated contemporary Indian composer and sitar player **Anoushka Shankar**; her first film score. Anoushka and her orchestral ensemble received a huge standing ovation when they performed the score live at the LFF. *Shiraz* will be released on DVD/Blu-ray by the BFI on 26 February 2018 and simultaneously launched online on BFI Player. A behind-the-scenes look at the recording of the score is the subject of a new BBC Four documentary to be broadcast in 2018.

Based on a play by Niranjan Pal, and directed by the German director Franz Osten, this sumptuous romance tells the love story of the 17th century princess who inspired the building of the world's most beautiful monument to love, the Taj Mahal. Shot entirely on location in India, with an all-Indian cast of thousands, it features beautiful photography, lavish costumes and gorgeous settings. Two infamous passionate kisses that occur in the film are even a surprise for modern audiences, and are really quite extraordinary for Indian cinema of the period.

This ground breaking Indian/British/German co-production was the idea of its charismatic producer **Himansu Rai**, who also plays the lead. *Shiraz* is a rarity; a surviving, sophisticated silent feature film made outside the major film producing nations of the west at the time. Rai plays Shiraz, the son of a humble village potter, who, when his childhood sweetheart Selima (**Enakshi Rama Rau**) is kidnapped and sold by slave traders to Prince Khurram (**Charu Roy**), follows her to Agra and devotes himself to protecting her.

The restoration of *Shiraz* has been based on the only surviving British version of the film; German and Indian versions appear to be lost. The BFI, a world leader in film preservation and restoration, holds the original negative material of the film in the BFI National Archive. Once the new 4K scan had been made, extensive grading and clean-up processes took place before digital elements were produced for screening.

The BFI commissioned Anoushka Shankar to compose a new score to accompany the film. Deeply rooted in the Indian classical music tradition, Anoushka studied exclusively from childhood under her father and guru, the late Ravi Shankar (whose own film credits included *Gandhi* and *Pather Panchali*), and made her professional debut as a classical sitarist at the age of 13. By the time she was 20, she had made three classical recordings and received her first Grammy® nomination, thereby becoming the first Indian female and youngest-ever nominee in the World Music category.

Anoushka was very aware of the musical choices that needed to be made in composing the score. *"I could try and be faithful to the period it is set in, the period it was made, or the period I'm writing in today"* she explains. *"And in the end, it's a mixture of all those things. I try and keep a balance between moments in the film where it feels appropriate to stay quite authentic and allow the Indian instruments to play in a traditional way. But elsewhere I want it to be more of a film experience and to make the music more immersive so people become more involved in the film. This means a rich, broad sound palette with lower, deeper tones than existed for Indian instruments at the time the story is set."*

Shiraz was premiered as a highlight of the BFI's contribution to UK/India 2017 Year of Culture, a year-long celebration of the long-standing relationship between India and the UK led by the British Council, which has seen a vast programme of cultural exchange and activity take place in cities across both countries. It included an extensive eight month programme of classic and contemporary Indian cinema at BFI Southbank.

During November 2017, the British Council and the BFI took *Shiraz* on tour to four Indian cities, Hyderabad, Kolkata, New Delhi and Mumbai, accompanied by a live performance of the score by Anoushka Shankar. The film was sold out and received a standing ovation at every show; a testament to the significance of its restoration and revival, and the unique opportunity for Indian audiences to see it.

It is hoped that there will be further screenings in the UK with the live score during 2018. In the meantime, the forthcoming cinema screenings of this wonderful romance, with Anoushka Shankar's most fitting score, are sure to entrance audiences all over the country.

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Images are available at www.image.net >BFI>Theatrical releases

More film information and screening venues: www.bfi.org.uk/releases

About the BFI National Archive

The BFI National Archive was founded in 1935 and has grown to become the one of the largest and most important collections of film and television in the world with over 180,000 films and 750,000 television programmes. For over 80 years the BFI has been an international leader in film

preservation and guardian of Britain's unparalleled film and TV heritage. The BFI is an innovator in presenting films to audiences in new and dynamic ways, from cinemas to film festivals, outdoor events to online video-on-demand. At the heart of all its activities is the BFI's central aim to ensure that everyone in the UK has access to the widest possible range of film and their own film heritage. That heritage includes all-time great British directors Alfred Hitchcock, David Lean and Powell and Pressburger; and the rich vein of documentary filmmaking, in which Britain led the world, including the lyrical work of Humphrey Jennings. The archive also boasts a significant Special Collections of filmmakers' papers as well as extensive stills, posters and production and costume designs along with original scripts, press books and related ephemera.

Expert teams undertake the time-consuming and complex task of restoring films at the BFI John Paul Getty Jr Conservation Centre in Hertfordshire. The BFI's most precious film materials are kept in optimum conditions in the world-leading Master Film Store in Warwickshire.

About the BFI

The BFI is the lead body for film in the UK with the ambition to create a flourishing film environment in which innovation, opportunity and creativity can thrive by:

- Connecting audiences to the widest choice of British and World cinema
- Preserving and restoring the most significant film collection in the world for today and future generations
- Championing emerging and world class film makers in the UK
- Investing in creative, distinctive and entertaining work
- Promoting British film and talent to the world
- Growing the next generation of film makers and audiences

The BFI is a Government arm's-length body and distributor of Lottery funds for film. The BFI serves a public role which covers the cultural, creative and economic aspects of film in the UK. It delivers this role:

- As the UK-wide organisation for film, a charity core funded by Government
- By providing Lottery and Government funds for film across the UK
- By working with partners to advance the position of film in the UK

Founded in 1933, the BFI is a registered charity governed by Royal Charter.

The BFI Board of Governors is chaired by Josh Berger CBE.