



28 September 2011

## Wonderful London!

### Rare films from the 1920s

Londoners will have a chance to see some wonderful and rare footage of London from the 1920s in one of the highlights of the Archive section of this year's BFI London Film Festival, presented in partnership with American Express, films for the most part unseen since original release by anyone other than a handful of researchers (screens Mon 17 Oct, 18.30 NFT1). This new BFI National Archive restoration of a series of films, made under the title **Wonderful London**, will be unlike most people's view of the city featuring Soho backstreets, Piccadilly Circus and Covent Garden along with lesser known parts of Clerkenwell, Whitechapel and Limehouse. They were provided as short travelogues for general audiences as part of a mixed cinema programme. The films are invaluable records of London 90 years ago, now all but beyond living memory.

London is one of the world's most consistently filmed cities. The Lumière Brothers sent representatives here in 1896. British pioneers such as RW Paul alongside a host of anonymous newsreel cameramen helped to create a rich historical record of this capital city. In the early 1920s film producer Harry B. Parkinson made two series of short films celebrating familiar and less familiar views of the capital. These simple travelogues injected interest by contrasting the different aspects of city life – East End and West End, Rotten Row and Smithfield, poor and rich, natives and immigrants. They sought out the unusual and quirky but also included plenty of crowd-pleasing scenes.

**Wonderful London** goes to parts of the city that other films have rarely reached. *Barging Through London* is a film taken along the Regent's Canal from Limehouse to Paddington. London's non-English population is the focus of *Cosmopolitan London*, a film whose casual racism would not have seemed out of place in the 1920s, although its

inter-titles highlight a wryly offensive tone, however, its images of French, Italians, Chinese, Africans and others reveal the parts of London where they settled, from Soho to Whitechapel, giving a rare sense of the long traditions of London's welcome to all races.

More familiar scenes of the set pieces of St. Paul's, Fleet Street, the river, Piccadilly Circus, Horseguards' Parade etc. are never less than fascinating in spite of their seeming familiarity, because of just how much has changed in the physical fabric of the city.

These six short films from the series have been restored by the restoration team at the BFI National archive from original 35mm nitrate prints using the latest digital techniques and bringing back the original tints and tones.

For fans of archive film the LFF Archive gala is an unmissable chance to see the world premiere of a new restoration of *The First Born* (1928), starring Miles Mander and Madeleine Carroll in a *tour de force* of late silent cinema, which reveals the manners and morals of the upper classes in the 1920s. [20 October, 7.30pm, Southbank Centre's Queen Elizabeth Hall].

## **Programme**

### **London's Free Shows** 628ft 9 mins

Free events in London, including street entertainers, a Punch and Judy show, pavement artists, road menders, a fire brigade demonstration, an abduction staged by a film company and the Changing of the Guard.

### **London off the Track** 746ft 11 mins

Views behind the usual façade of London's streets including the mews behind St. George's Hospital, Philios Terrace, Kinnerton Street, Dr. Johnson's house and the Olde Cheshire Cheese, Essex Stairs, Bankside, Clerkenwell, and Smithfield.

### **London's Sunday** 638ft 10 mins

Some favourite Sunday activities for Londoner's including scenes at the Gaiety Theatre, the Sunday market at Petticoat Lane and riding in Hyde Park.

### **Cosmopolitan London** 741ft 11 mins

London's cosmopolitan inhabitants including scenes in Soho, Whitechapel Road, Little Italy in Clerkenwell and the studios of Cheyne Walk, the colonial headquarters on the Strand, Lascars in Limehouse, the Scandinavian Mission Hall and the streets of Chinese

Pennyfields. Finishes with Trooping the Colour ceremony at the Horse Guards.

**Flowers of London** 796ft 12 mins

A look at the Londoner's love of flowers from domestic gardens to florists shops to the great market at Covent Garden Market and the Piccadilly Circus flower girls sitting under Eros. It includes close shots of a great variety of favourite blooms finishing with a shot of the Genotaph, surrounded with floral tributes.

**Barging through London** 839ft 12 mins

Travelling across London via the Regent's canal by barge affords us unusual views of the capital. From the docks in Limehouse through East London, under Mile End Road, past Whitechapel, Kentish Town, King's Cross and Camden Lock we travel past the London Zoo to finish in Paddington basin.

The programme will be introduced by **Bryony Dixon**, curator, Silent Film, BFI National Archive who is also available for interview by arrangement. Author of **100 Silent Films** (BFI Publishing, 2011) and programmer of the British Silent Film Festival, Bryony Dixon is an internationally acknowledged expert on cinema of the silent period. She is currently working on the BFI's major project for the Cultural Olympiad 2012, the restoration of Alfred Hitchcock's nine surviving silent films. She will be joined by one of the technical staff who oversaw the expert work of restoration **Scott Starck**, Production Manager, BFI National Archive.

**Credits**

**Wonderful London**

Prod /Dir. Harry Parkinson and Dir. Frank Miller

Footage and running times at 18fps

Total running time programme + introduction = 75 mins

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## 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
- Investing in creative, distinctive and entertaining work
- Promoting British film and talent to the world
- Growing the next generation of filmmakers and audiences

## BFI National Archive

The BFI National Archive was founded in 1935 and has grown to become the largest collection of film and television in the world with over 180,000 films and 750,000 television programmes. Expert teams undertake the time-consuming and complex task of restoring films. With specialist storage facilities in Warwickshire and Hertfordshire the archive also boasts significant collections of stills, posters and designs along with original scripts, press books and related ephemera. We are funded partly by OfCom as the official archive for ITV, Channel Four and Channel Five. We record a representative sample of television across Britain's terrestrial channels and are the official archive of moving image records of Parliament.

## BFI Mediatheques

Anyone can get access to collections of over 2000 titles from the archive for free at BFI Mediatheques around the UK, currently at BFI Southbank, BFI National Library, QUAD Derby, Central Library Cambridge and Wrexham Library, and Discovery Museum, Newcastle-upon-Tyne.

## BFI National Archive Online

Our YouTube channel **BFI Films** has over 400 items which can be viewed online. [Over 1,100,000 views have been recorded for *Alice in Wonderland* (1903) uploaded to coincide with the release of Tim Burton's *Alice in Wonderland*]. Academic access for higher education is through the **BFI InView** project. Schools and educational institutions have access to a wide range of material at **screenonline.org.uk**. This is in addition to paid access at the BFI for other research needs.

## BFI Films

12,000 prints a year are loaned out by the BFI National Archive to support the programmes of 800 venues across the UK and overseas and our DVD label regularly issues selected items. These have included the hugely popular British Transport Films Collection series, the legendary documentaries of The GPO Film Unit, the collections of the Central Office of Information, *Shadows of Progress: Documentary Film in Post-War Britain 1951 – 1977*, *Tales from the Shipyard: Britain's shipbuilding heritage on film* and *The Great White Silence*, the official film record of Scott's ill-fated Polar expedition.

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