

# THE HIPPODROME FESTIVAL OF SILENT CINEMA

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WEDNESDAY 16 MARCH – SUNDAY 20 MARCH 2016

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Saturday 19 March | 19:45

## Wunder der Schöpfung – Wonder of Creation

Dir. Hanns Walter Kornblum | Germany | 1925 | 1h 32m

With Paul Bildt, Willy Kaiser-Heyl, Theodor Loos

Accompanied by a World Premier by Herschel 36

Composition, premiere and Scottish tour supported by Film Hub Scotland  
part of BFI's Film Audience Network

Screening material courtesy of Munich Filmmuseum

The past two centuries have seen mind-boggling progress in awareness of the vast scale and emptiness, but complexity, of our universe, beginning with proof (by Henderson, Scotland's first Astronomer Royal and others) that stars are over 200,000 times farther than our sun. One hundred years ago Einstein's General Theory of Relativity brought us science crucial to *Interstellar* (Nolan, USA, 2014), to Enterprise's warp-drive, and to GPS operation while recent detection of gravitational waves from colliding black holes opens a new cosmic window. The 1929 discovery of expansion of the cosmos by Slipher (attributed by history to Hubble) eventually revealed it as stretching ten billion times further than Henderson's stars. Amid these astronomy breakthroughs *Wunder der Schöpfung* was produced - itself a *wonder of creation*. Contemporary science/scifi movies include *A Trip to the Moon* (Méliès, France, 1902), *Aelita Queen of Mars* (Protazanov, USSR, 1924) and *Frau im Mond* (Lang, Germany, 1929) - but none achieved the outstanding scope and graphics of *Wunder* which, for its era, I would compare with Scott's superb 2013 *Hidden Universe Imax 3D*.

Wearing my astronomer hat, I have to say that in scientific accuracy for its era, *Wunder* was in places not *Wonderful*, with more science fantasy than fact, falling far short of Nolan's superb consultation for *Interstellar's* science and, for me, detracting somewhat from the visuals. Nevertheless, the remarkable interweaving of object and diagram animations with real time-lapse movies and acted scenes must have been a mind-blowing revelation in 1925. Even today these are a pleasure to watch even if leaping high even on Mars is hard without oxygen, as are the incongruous appearance of the giant, and the rock-climbing on the rock-less  
*continues overleaf*



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Gas Giant Jupiter. However, looking back in space and time at cowboys or Moses in action, by travelling faster than the light they emitted, is the movie's biggest gaff, having been recognized as impossible since Einstein in 1905.

The lengthy introduction is a mostly accurate look at changing cosmic perceptions from the Greeks through religious earth-centred obsessions, to the telescope and modern astrophysics. However, reference to the observations which drove progress is at best sparse, especially regarding the large set of planetary positions measured by Islamic scientists in the so-called Dark Ages and used later in Kepler's breakthroughs in orbit theory. The following inventory of celestial objects and phenomena (phases, eclipses) with animations and movies is of high calibre (other than the patronizing scenes of eclipse-fearing natives and women). The solar material opens well, describing sunspot activity and its auroral connection – which around 1900 Lord Kelvin had pronounced impossible. Sadly the remainder is not about the sun itself but an elementary ramble about seasons. I do love the images in the fanciful spaceflight to the moon and beyond, despite some confusion over the distance to the moon and the incomprehensible statement concerning a measurement confirming the 'mathematically proven universal temperature -273° C of space'.

Moving on, it is pronounced that only on leaving the solar system is weightlessness experienced, whereas we have known at least since Galileo that all free motion anywhere in space involves weightlessness. Nevertheless the clever simulations of the space wo/men experiencing the joys of weightlessness are fun as we enter the emptiness beyond the Milky Way.

*Wunder* closes with bleak scenes of possible eventual fire and brimstone Armageddon fates of earth and humanity confronting terrified crowds, though offering as solace the notion that nature is ultimately benign via a tranquil ploughman image and yet another quotation from Goethe!

## MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT

Herschel 36 is a young, massive, hot, bright star in the Lagoon Nebula's star-birth womb. H36 is also the young hot bright Scottish free improvisation jazz duo who composed and play the new score for *Wunder*. Einstein's 1922 Nobel Prize (when *Wunder* was being conceived) was primarily for his work on the 'photo-electric effect', part of the spooky quantum world where nothing is certain until it is observed. Einstein loved music as well as physics and I have no doubt that (apart from turning in his grave over *Wunder's* Relativity gaffs) he would, as you will, greatly enjoy observing H36's quantum improvisation of *Wunder der Schöpfung* unfold.

**By Professor John C. Brown, 10<sup>th</sup> Astronomer Royal for Scotland**  
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