

THE HIPPODROME FESTIVAL OF SILENT CINEMA

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Wednesday 13th March – Sunday 17th March 2013

Box office: 01324 506850 | hippfest.co.uk
The Hippodrome, 10 Hope Street, Bo'ness EH51 0AA

Sunday 17 March 2013 | 20:00

THE GOOSE WOMAN



Dir. Clarence Brown | US | 1925 | b&w | 1h 20m

World premiere of new commissioned score by Jane Gardner
Accompanied live by Jane Gardner, Hazel Morrison and Su-a Lee

This work and pre-event workshops for secondary schools were supported with funds from the PRS for Music Foundation. This presentation of The Goose Woman by arrangement with Photoplay Productions.

At the end of the silent era Universal studios destroyed most of their silent films, with the exception of potential money earners that they might wish in future to reissue. Because *The Goose Woman's* negatives showed signs of decomposition they were thrown away too. Luckily the film had also been released on 16 mm prints for home viewing. If not the film may have been lost forever.

In 1959, attracted by the star names of the cast, Kevin Brownlow bought a print from a film library in Coventry for £16:

“I laced up my projector and saw for the first time the credit ‘Directed by Clarence Brown’. This opening sequence alone made me aware that those who made the regular American silent films were far more skilful and sophisticated than historians had given them credit for. You cannot imagine how different this film looked compared with most of the commercial releases I used to watch in the late 1950s, overlit studio pictures designed for drive-ins, with little sense of reality. I felt that if this was an example of the unknown American silent film, I would happily devote the rest of my life to looking for more of them.”

The newly restored version shown here was only possible because of two surviving prints, one from the Hampton Collection, which David Packard purchased for UCLA and this one bought by Kevin Brownlow all those years ago. The restoration by Robert Gitt has been eagerly awaited by the silent film community. Previously many had only seen a tantalising few minutes from the film (the opening scene that Brownlow, its tireless champion, had screened in talks). The emotional power of these precious moments was



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enough to show that here was silent film at the height of its powers. What performances, what settings, what lighting and camerawork!

The script was adapted from a story by Rex Beach which was based on a real-life 1922 murder case, in which a once famous opera singer pretended that she had witnessed the murder to attract media attention. Universal paid twenty thousand dollars for the rights after the story ran in *Cosmopolitan* magazine.

Louise Dresser was cast in the title role. She had worked predominantly on the stage and in vaudeville (she knew Buster Keaton and his family from these circuits) but following the critical acclaim she received for this role she would go on to star with such luminaries as Rudolph Valentino. Frequently in close up and without make up, she displays a breathtaking range of emotions. Although the character revels somewhat in her despair and gin-fuelled hatred, Dresser manages to make her sympathetic. The 1920s perhaps conjures up the image of the new woman; jazz age gals, youthful, flirtatious and devil-may-care figures, but here we have something quite different.



Image courtesy of Photoplay Productions

Dresser's performance is also served by wonderful cinematography. Almost expressionistic lighting and sets express the inner life of its mourning heroine. The film is directed beautifully by Clarence Brown (Greta Garbo's favourite director). As Brownlow observed in his seminal book *The Parade's Gone By*, "Brown was a brilliant technician, but he also had a warm feeling for people. In his handling of players, and of situations, he achieved a naturalism that, even when stylised, was always convincing."

The film is also notable for its supporting cast. Jack Pickford, as her estranged son, plays the part with a delicacy and elegance comparable to his more famous sister Mary. Constance Bennett, who became a major star in the sound era, plays his love interest. *The Goose Woman* makes one mourn those silents that are lost and rejoice those that have been saved from oblivion.

Dr Kelly Robinson is silent film programmer for Birds Eye View film festival celebrating women filmmakers (www.birds-eye-view.co.uk) and The White Bus Ltd providing film and video production, distribution and exhibition services (www.thewhitebus.org.uk). Kelly is also lecturer in silent film at the University of Southampton.