

HIPPODROME silent film festival

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WEDNESDAY 20 MARCH - SUNDAY 24 MARCH 2019

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Hindle Wakes (1927)

Closing Night: Sunday 24 March 2019

Performing live: Stephen Horne

“So long as there are spinning mills in Lancashire I can earn enough to keep myself respectable.”

For one week every year the workers from the Lancashire town of Hindle leave their dreary lives at the cotton mills and give themselves up to hectic holiday-making, known locally as the 'Wakes'. Breath-taking scenes at Blackpool's pleasure resort take us on a literal and emotional rollercoaster. Stanley Houghton's trailblazing social play about the misunderstandings between generation and class creates a role-model heroine in Fanny Hawthorne who refuses to comply with the hypocrisies of her parents and employers.

For Maurice Elvey's 1927 film version of Houghton's story, the 'thoroughly- modern' protagonist might chime with our preconceptions about the flapper and the new woman post WW1, women getting the vote (although the young working class mill girls wouldn't have qualified) and a shift in attitudes. But we'd be completely wrong. Houghton's play was written in 1912 before any of these things happened. The story, created a furore but was so ground breaking and so well plotted that it was made and remade as film (in 1918, 1927, 1932, 1950, 1952 and 1976) and then as television drama. Elvey had himself made the first version for Samuelson's in 1918 - this is long lost - but he liked it enough to want to remake it. And boy did he! He told historian Denis Gifford he thought it was "a really great play; it is really about something." With healthier post-war budgets he made it his masterpiece, with exterior scenes shot at Monton Mill near Salford, on Blackpool Pleasure Beach, in the Tower Ballroom and on the coast at Llandudno. Not even Variety had a bad word to say about the result.

Viewers today will appreciate the fabulous whirlwind of the Blackpool trip but may find the second half a bit talkie, but this is integral to the atmosphere of the story, as the young people have to own up to the life-changing consequences of their all too brief taste of freedom. We see them full of life and fun and love, then in the oppressive setting of home as the moralistic parents, and tyrannical employers conspire to sweep it all under a carpet of respectability. It's depressing, we've seen this story a thousand times before, but the reaction, when it comes from our heroine is almost as shocking as it must have been in 1912. The first blast of the trumpet.

By Bryony Dixon, Curator of Silent Film, BFI National Archive

Dir. Maurice Elvey | Scr. Victor Saville | Ph. Jack Cox | UK | 1927 | cert U | English intertitles | 1h 57m (+ short accompanied by Mike Nolan)

With: Estelle Brody, John Stuart, Norman McKinnel, Peggy Carlisle, Humberstone Wright, Marie Ault, Irene Rooke.

Screening courtesy Park Circus

