



SIGHT AND SOUND GREATEST FILMS OF ALL TIME 2022: 21=

The Passion of Joan of Arc

The Passion of Joan of Arc is an extraordinary achievement. Based on the original 1431 transcript of the trial of the teenager, Dreyer's sparse style, filmed with little emphasis on plot or setting, and almost entirely in facial close-ups, draws you into the world of Jeanne's suffering. It is perhaps the bravest expression of cinematic art of the silent era.

Bryony Dixon

Silent cinema at its most sublimely expressive, Carl Theodor Dreyer's masterpiece is an austere but hugely affecting dramatisation of the trial of St Joan of Arc.

Released as talking pictures were already taking over, Carl Theodor Dreyer's first film in France – the Danish master had previously worked in Scandinavia and Germany – is a remarkably distilled and refined example of silent storytelling. Based on the record of the 15th-century trial and execution of Joan of Arc, the film focuses on an extraordinarily concentrated central performance from Renée Falconetti, allegedly the result of merciless needling from Dreyer during the filming.

Famous for its spare visual style, Dreyer's film creates compelling drama from its looming facial close-ups, interspersing the plaintive Joan with the penetrating gazes of her zealous inquisitors. Watching the flickers of anguish and resolve across Falconetti's features, registered in stark detail by Rudolph Maté's cinematography, is one of cinema's most purely moving experiences.

'Renée Falconetti gives the most impressive performance ever recorded on film in this silent classic. Carl Theodor Dreyer expanded the potential of the close-up in this chronicle of Joan of Arc's trial and execution. This "hymn to the triumph of the soul over life", as Dreyer called it, re-emerges in *Vivre sa vie* (1962), Jean-Luc Godard's masterpiece, in which a devastated Anna Karina watches Joan's pains in a film theatre and cries with her.' (Kaya Genc)

'I think it's in the last decade that Dreyer's somehow rapturously austere work of historical cinema shifted from being a film that enthralled me as a scholar to one that fully involved and moved me as a viewer – and of course, finally seeing it in an enveloping cinema environment, rather than a university lecture theatre or my own living room, was the instigating factor. You don't absolutely need to see every crisply restored pore on Falconetti's extraordinary face to viscerally feel her pain, but it certainly doesn't hurt.' (Guy Lodge)

'Simply the best (silent) film about (silent) resistance.' (Anton Dolin)

'A dream and a nightmare of spiritual ecstasy. Dreyer and his design collaborators create an amalgam of the 14th and 20th centuries, and somehow reach into the future with every stroke. Renée Falconetti's performance: incomparable, unbeatable, anguished and enough to make an atheist think things over.' (Michael Phillips)

'A quote from Jean Epstein's 1921 essay *Magnification* is relevant here: "The close-up is an intensifying agent because of its size alone... whatever its numerical value, this magnification acts on one's feelings more to transform than to confirm them, and personally, it makes me uneasy... The close-up

modifies the drama by the impact of proximity. Pain is within reach. If I stretch out my arm I touch you, and that is intimacy. I can count the eyelashes of this suffering. I would be able to taste the tears".' (Anne Gjelsvik)

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The first impression one gains from seeing this film is its silent cry for sound. Most of the time is occupied by five gruelling cross-examinations of Joan. The great ecclesiastical heads with their gesticulating mouths seem to require some corresponding cataclysmic uproar of the human voice. Dreyer himself says that he would like to have made the film with sound. But the treatment of the film as it stands is purely visual, and very often involves a carefully contrived interplay between the written dialogue and the visual action, which does not duplicate it so much as follow it through. The film, therefore, operates on two planes at once, first the hard, factual plane of the terms of the examination, with its succession of wearying questions directed at Joan and given to the audience in form of printed words, and, second, the stylised visual interpretation of what the trial meant emotionally and psychologically to Joan and to her persecutors, the French ecclesiastics led by Bishop Cauchon and the English occupation authorities led by the gross, overbearing military figure of the Earl of Warwick.

The process of the trial itself, which is conducted in the brutal manner of a third degree investigation, has its twentieth century parallels, for it is essentially an ideological trial in which Joan for reasons of state must be led to condemn herself for the sake of power politics. The stylised presentation of the trial gives it a universality which goes beyond its immediate historical setting. Joan is the victim of an earthly authority which cannot allow itself to be put to question by a saint whose integrity of soul sees beyond and therefore through its complex diplomacy. The significance of the trial of Joan of Arc will always appeal to poets who celebrate our human liberties, and the film remains almost unbearably poignant.

Falconetti, who never made another significant appearance in films, relives Dreyer's interpretation of Joan so intensely that one becomes completely oblivious of her as an actress. This *is* Joan of Arc, or, at any rate, a Joan of Arc, her face sunk and wasting, her body near collapse, her short hair matted with sweat and eventually shaved from her head before our eyes, her cheeks streaked with the tear drops of real suffering. Her lips move, but she seldom seems to speak more than a word or a phrase. Her head, photographed in almost continuous close up, mostly against a plain white background, turns now this way, now that. She peers round over a shoulder raised in fear; now her head sinks in profile, or lifts full face as her eyes light with the emotion of her belief that she is fulfilling the will of God. She is not Joan the Warrior, but Joan the sexless maid dressed in a poor jerkin and surrounded by towering male enemies she cannot understand but whose trickeries she evades through the great integrity of her faith. Dreyer's relentless presentation of Joan's situation is without any romantic relief. There is no way out for her except the way of recantation closed to her by her own convictions, and even that way, which she seems at one stage to be prepared to take, would undoubtedly be denied to her by the English authorities. The situation gives full play to Dreyer's passionate desire to portray on the screen the very roots of human persecution and suffering.

Roger Manvell, *Sight and Sound*, December 1950

THE PASSION OF JOAN OF ARC (LA PASSION DE JEANNE D'ARC)

Director: Carl Th. Dreyer

Production Company: Société Générale de Films

Unit Managers: Martoff, Marcel Rémond

Casting Unit Manager: Louis Osmont

Assistant Directors: Ralph Holm, Paul La Cour

Screenplay: Carl Th. Dreyer

Based on the novels by: Joseph Delteil

Photography: Rudolph Maté, Joseph Kottula

Stills Photography: Jean Soulat, Boussus

Editors: Carl Th. Dreyer, Marguerite Beaugé

Set Designers: Jean-Victor Hugo, Hermann Warm

Costumes: Valentine Hugo

Historical Adviser: Pierre Champion

Cast

Renée Falconetti (*Joan of Arc*)

Eugène-Charles-Joseph Silvain (*Bishop Pierre Cauchon*)

Maurice Schutz (*Nicolas Loyseleur*)

Louis Ravet (*Jean Beaupère*)

André Berley (*Jean d'Estivet*)

Antonin Artaud (*Jean Massieu*)

Gilbert Dalleu (*Jean Lemaître*)

Jean D' Yd (*Nicolas de Houpeville*)

Alexandre Mihalesco, Armand Lurville, Raymond Narlay, Henri Maillard,

Léon Larive, Paul Fromet, Paul Jorge, Carlo De Dona, Fournes-Goffard,

Armand Caratis, Jacques Arnna, Jack Piera, Paul Delauzac, Jean Aymé,

Henri Gaultier, Michel Simon, Dacheux, Persitz, Christian Argentin, Derval,

Bac, Robert Le Flon, Valbret, Emile Piotte, Polonsky, André Marnay,

Dmitrieff, Paul Velsa, Gitenet, Beri, Nikitine, Bazaine (*judges*)

Camille Bardou, Martoff (*soldiers*)

Sommaire, Badin (*clerks*)

Granowski, Rouf (*torturers*)

France 1928

81 mins

SIGHT AND SOUND GREATEST FILMS OF ALL TIME 2022

The Passion of Joan of Arc (La passion de Jeanne d'Arc) Sun 5 Mar 14:00 (with live accompaniment); Wed 15 Mar 20:40 (with score)

Citizen Kane Sun 5 Mar 16:15; Tue 7 Mar 20:30

Cléo from 5 to 7 (Cléo de 5 à 7)

Sun 5 Mar 17:45; Wed 8 Mar 21:00

2001: A Space Odyssey

Sun 5 Mar 19:00; Thu 9 Mar 18:00

Sunrise: A Song of Two Humans Mon 6 Mar 14:00; Mon 13 Mar 20:35

Au hasard Balthazar Mon 6 Mar 18:30

Vertigo Mon 6 Mar 20:30; Thu 9 Mar 14:30; Wed 15 Mar 18:10

In the Mood for Love (Fa yeung nin wah) Mon 6 Mar 20:40; Fri 10 Mar 21:00; Sun 12 Mar 18:30

Late Spring (Banshun) Mon 6 Mar 20:45; Tue 7 Mar 14:30; Sun 12 Mar 18:20

The Night of the Hunter

Tue 7 Mar 18:00; Sat 11 Mar 20:45

Mulholland Dr. Tue 7 Mar 20:10; Tue 14 Mar 20:15

The Searchers Tue 7 Mar 20:35

Beau Travail Wed 8 Mar 14:30; Fri 10 Mar 20:45; Mon 13 Mar 18:20 (+ intro by Catherine Wheatley, Reader in Film Studies, King's College London)

Daisies (Sedmikrásky) + Meshes of the Afternoon Wed 8 Mar 18:20 (+ intro)

Portrait of a Lady on Fire (Portrait de la jeune fille en feu) Wed 8 Mar 20:30

Singin' in the Rain Thu 9 Mar 18:10

(+ intro by Miles Eady, Film Writer and Curator); Tue 14 Mar 14:30

Man With a Movie Camera (Chelovek s kino-apparatom) Thu 9 Mar 20:50

Persona Thu 9 Mar 21:05

Tokyo Story (Tôkyô monogatari) Fri 10 Mar 18:00; Wed 15 Mar 14:30

Close-Up (Nema-ye Nazdik)

Fri 10 Mar 18:30; Wed 15 Mar 20:50

The Godfather Fri 10 Mar 19:00; Sun 12 Mar 18:15

La Règle du jeu (The Rules of the Game)

Sat 11 Mar 18:05

Do the Right Thing Sat 11 Mar 18:10

Jeanne Dielman, 23 quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles Sat 11 Mar 18:50

Playtime Sat 11 Mar 20:30

Shoah Sun 12 Mar 11:00

Apocalypse Now: Final Cut

Sun 12 Mar 20:00 BFI IMAX

Taxi Driver Mon 13 Mar 20:40

Seven Samurai (Shichinin no samurai)

Tue 14 Mar 18:40

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