



BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

La Ronde

La Ronde

Director: Max Ophuls

Production Company: Sacha Gordine

Presented by: Sacha Gordine

Production Manager: Ralph Baum

Unit Production Manager: Renée Bardon

Administration Director: Grégoire Geftman

Production Secretary: Noële Mouton

Assistant Directors: Paul Feyder, Tony Aboyants

Script Supervisor: Lucie Lichtig

Adaptation: Jacques Natanson, Max Ophuls

Dialogue: Jacques Natanson

Based on the play 'Reigen' by: Arthur Schnitzler

Director of Photography: Christian Matras

Camera Operator: Alain Douarinou

Assistant Camera: E. Bourreaud

Stills Photography: J.F. Clair, Sam Levin

Editor: Azar

Assistant Editor: S. Rondeau

Art Director: d'Eaubonne

Assistant Art Directors: Marpoux, M. Frédéric

Set Decorators: Merangel, Vergne

Costumes: G. Annenkov

Costumes Executed by: Madame Gromtseff

Make-up: Carmen Brelle

Music: Oscar Straus

Music Adapter: Joe Hayos

Sound: Pierre Calvet

Cast

Anton Walbrook (*M. Poldy, the game leader*)

Simone Signoret (*Léocadis, the prostitute*)

Serge Reggiani (*Franz, the soldier*)

Simone Simon (*Marie, the chambermaid*)

Daniel Gélin (*Alfred, the young man*)

Danielle Darrieux

(*Emma Breitkopf, the young woman*)

Fernand Gravey (*Charles Breitkopf*)

Odette Joyeux (*Sophie, the shop girl*)

Jean-Louis Barrault (*Robert Kuhlenskampf, the poet*)

Isa Miranda (*Charlotte, the actress*)

Gérard Philipe (*the count*)

France 1950

93 mins

Digital 4K (restoration)

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SPOILER WARNING The following notes give away the film's ending.

In Ophuls' imaginative, highly personal adaptation of Arthur Schnitzler's play, he added an omniscient narrator/master of ceremonies, played by Archers regular Walbrook, admired by Powell partly for his 'enigmatic and elegant personality'. His wit, detachment and charm are wholly apposite as he introduces and comments on a carousel of erotic encounters involving characters of different social status in 19th-century Vienna.

bfi.org.uk

A contemporary review

The release of *La Ronde* in London is exceptionally good timing. For Max Ophuls' film, gay, stylish and civilised, has already in a way become a part of the Festival which its Curzon run is likely to outlast. The immediate success of *La Ronde* is due neither to the X certificate nor to sensational reports of its wicked daring (useful as these factors will no doubt be in recovering the large price paid). There was an audience waiting for the film before the critics had time to write about it, an audience who had sensed the very special expression of a very personal talent.

I am unacquainted with Schnitzler, but he has clearly been as delicately and firmly bent to the design of Ophuls as was Stefan Zweig in *Letter from an Unknown Woman*. *La Ronde* is a comment, romantically phrased, on the deceptions of love. It is framed in the stylised elegance of Hapsburg Vienna at that period when, the days of power over and the decline well advanced, it earned the title of 'gay' and launched a thousand musical comedies. But, in all of the nine episodes which are linked together in a roundabout of love, the situations and the dialogue take us wittily, painfully and poignantly close to the life we know today. The thesis: that in the pursuit of love we deceive first ourselves and then our partner, who repeats the process, and so on and so on.

Thus the prostitute gives herself free to the soldier who can't be rid of her too quickly or too rudely in order to seduce the maidservant who, when he has become vulnerable to her through love, betrays him with the young master. And he in his next step to manhood forsakes the maidservant to seduce the young wife, who returns guiltily to the sanctimonious husband who is deceiving her with the shopgirl he has set up in an apartment. She in turn becomes a ready victim of the egocentric poet who, tired as soon as he has started the affair, resumes his amorous duel with the actress whose ruthless self-love is even greater than his own. She in turn avidly pursues the Count whose coldblooded ceremonial dissipations lead him out of her arms into those of the prostitute of the original episode. And what more ironic and fitting than that on his way out the Count should run into the original soldier on his way in – seeking the only comfort procurable?

BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

La Ronde

Tue 14 Nov 20:45; Sun 19 Nov 12:00; Thu 30 Nov 18:20

Black Orpheus

Orfeu Negro
Wed 15 Nov 18:00 (+ intro by journalist and broadcaster Kevin Le Gendre)

The Queen of Spades

Thu 16 Nov 20:40

Do the Right Thing

Fri 17 Nov 18:10

Casablanca

Sat 18 Nov 11:40

The Tempest

Sat 18 Nov 13:00; Wed 22 Nov 18:20 (+ intro by Claire Smith, BFI National Archive Senior Curator)

Blood and Sand

Sat 18 Nov 20:30

Pandora and the Flying Dutchman

Mon 20 Nov 20:30

Wings of Desire

Der Himmel über Berlin
Tue 21 Nov 14:30; Sat 25 Nov 20:25

An American in Paris

Thu 23 Nov 18:00; Sun 26 Nov 11:30

Phantom Thread

Thu 23 Nov 20:30

The Grand Budapest Hotel

Fri 24 Nov 18:15

The Private Life of Henry VIII

Mon 27 Nov 14:40

The Age of Innocence

Tue 28 Nov 20:20

Orlando

Wed 29 Nov 18:20 (+ intro by writer, curator and researcher Jenny Chamarette)

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It will suffice to list the players in the order of their appearance and to state that, with the exception of the last two, they give the faultless, apprehensive performances without which the whole delicate structure would have crashed. They are Simone Signoret, Serge Reggiani, Simone Simon, Daniel Gélin, Danielle Darrieux, Fernand Gravey, Odette Joyeux, Jean-Louis Barrault, Isa Miranda, Gérard Philipe.

The story is set in motion by Anton Walbrook, unrecognisably polished and sympathetic after his years on the English screen. As master of ceremonies, commentator, and minor participant in the piece, he steps from the present day into the romantically misted Vienna of the past, and in the deserted square starts the merry-go-round (literally) and the first adventure to the tune of a waltz by Oscar Straus. This haunting waltz tune recurs throughout the film and becomes an ironic signal of the act of consummation; of love's triumph or defeat, whichever you will.

Though Ophuls can leave you in little doubt – for the episodes build up to an increasingly bitter comment, and the two final scenes cruelly mock the plight of their trapped victims. Yet he is less successful with these culminating scenes than with the open and gaily cynical earlier passages which prepare the way. To be fair, there are signs of some clumsy and harmful cutting in these two stories, but to be equally honest there are greater signs of serious miscasting in the selection of Gérard Philipe for the count and Isa Miranda for the actress.

In the exchanges between the young wife (Danielle Darrieux) and the husband (Fernand Gravey), *La Ronde* touches the apex of brilliance. The cutting, the magical movement of the camera round the beds, the dialogue, the acting, contribute to a wickedly amusing double exposure of the delusions of marriage and of adultery. Ophuls was never happier, nor for that matter was Danielle Darrieux.

It is not really surprising that Ophuls can still invest the cliché of Old Vienna with all the elegant raptures that Lubitsch, among so many, could never encompass. But to do it with so little ostensible elaboration denotes the true romantic artist. And this is not to demean the invaluable contributions of d'Eaubonne (decor) and Matras (camera).

To me *La Ronde* suggests a Mozart Theme and Variations, at once formal and gay, cynical and tender, romantic and ruthless.

Richard Winnington, *Sight and Sound*, June 1951