



SILENT CINEMA

The Vagabond Queen

Long Fliv the King

Directed by: Leo McCarey
Supervising Director: F. Richard Jones
©: Pathé Exchange
Production Company: Hal Roach Studios *
Presented by: Hal Roach
Photographed by: Floyd Jackman
Edited by: Richard Currier
Titles by: H.M. Walker
Cast:
Charley Chase
Martha Sleeper
Max Davidson
Oliver Hardy
Fred Malatesta
USA 1926
20 mins
Digital

The Vagabond Queen

Director: G.M. Bolvary
Production Company: British International Pictures
Scenario: Val Valentine
Adaptation: Rex Taylor
From an original story by: Douglas Furber
Photography: Charles Rosher
Assistant Photographer: Walter J. Harvey
Editor: Emile De Ruelle
Art Director: Hugh Gee
Cast:
Betty Balfour (*Sally/Princess Xonia*)
Glen Byam Shaw (*Jimmie*)
Ernest Thesiger (*Katoff*)
Charles Dormer (*Prince Adolphe*)
Harry Terry (*Winkleburg*)
Dino Galvani (*Ilmar*)
Ralph Leslie (*Nicholas*)
UK 1929
62 mins
35mm

With live musical accompaniment by
Stephen Horne

BECOME A BFI MEMBER

Enjoy a great package of film benefits including priority booking at BFI Southbank and BFI Festivals. Join today at bfi.org.uk/join

SIGHT AND SOUND

Never miss an issue with **Sight and Sound**, the BFI's internationally renowned film magazine. Subscribe from just £25*
* Price based on a 6-month print subscription (UK only). More info: sightandsoundsubs.bfi.org.uk

**SIGHT
AND
SOUND**

+ intro by BFI curator Bryony Dixon

Before we had the universes of Star Wars, DC, Marvel etc, there was the fantasy land of Ruritania, a make-believe central-European kingdom in which princesses were imperilled by glamorous but deadly pretenders to the throne, and where mistaken identity was the norm. The already ridiculous Ruritania was ripe for parody. This merciless and fun-filled example was impressively directed by Geza von Bolvary and gives full rein to the comedic talents of Betty Balfour and a spiky Ernest Thesiger.

bfi.org.uk

In 1927 exhibitor Sidney Bernstein conducted a series of questionnaires to patrons of his cinemas the results of which were published in the trade journal *Kinematograph Weekly*. Number 1 in the list of female stars admired by both male and female patrons was Betty Balfour. Balfour was one of only two British stars whose fame in Britain was equal, if not greater than, that of their Hollywood counterparts; the other star was Ivor Novello. There was even a Betty Balfour fan club that had five hundred members in 1927.

Balfour was known as 'the British Mary Pickford' or as 'Britain's Queen of Happiness'. Her popularity was based on her down-to-earth comic charm rather than on sex appeal, attributes she shared with Pickford. Yet Balfour also had qualities which were distinct from Pickford's persona; her manner was perhaps less refined, more boisterous and at times tinged with sadness – a character quite difficult to define and all her own.

Betty Balfour was born in London in 1903, and made her stage debut aged only ten in 1913. In 1920 she performed at the Alhambra Theatre where T.A. Welsh and George Pearson, from British production company Welsh-Pearson, saw her, and Balfour was signed for *Nothing Else Matters*. Her popularity with British audiences was encouraged by a series of comedies produced by the company and directed by Pearson. In these she starred as 'Squibs', a character based on a music-hall sketch of an exuberant cockney flower girl. Apparently her collaboration with Pearson ended when he asked Balfour to marry him.

In a review of *Champagner* (British title *Bright Eyes*) directed by the Austrian Géza von Bolváry the US film journal *Variety* said Balfour was a 'nice little comedienne, perhaps England's best screen actress, but here she does not photograph up to international standard.' Yet most of her films were well received in the US. Balfour did not attempt to break into Hollywood but instead, encouraged by the European connections the British industry nurtured during this time, worked frequently in Germany and France. She starred in *Die sieben Töchter der Frau Gyurkovics* (Ragnar Hylten-Cavallius, 1926) with Willy Fritsch and in an Anglo-German production *Die Regimentstochter* (aka *Daughter of the Regiment*, Hans Behrendt, 1929). In France she worked for Marcel l'Herbier in *Le Diable au coeur* (1928) and for Louis Mercanton in *Croquette* (1927). These international connections would be affected with the introduction of sound when the transnational appeal of many actors was lost. Although Balfour was fluent in French she no longer worked internationally in the sound era.

REGULAR PROGRAMME

Relaxed Screening: The Magic Flute Trollflöjten
+ intro & discussion

Mon 20 May 18:00

Families: The Boy and the Heron

Kimitachi wa do Ikiruka

Sun 26 May 12:30

Restored: The Small Back Room + intro by the BFI Conservation team

Tue 28 May 18:10

Restored: The Runner Davandeh

Tue 4 Jun 18:15

Silent Cinema: Human Law

Sun 9 Jun 14:50

Projecting the Archive: Murder in the Family + intro by Josephine Botting, BFI National Archive Curator

Tue 18 Jun 18:20

Relaxed Screening: The Machine That Kills Bad People La macchina ammazzacattivi + intro and discussion

Mon 24 Jun 18:35

Restored: The Lighthouse Mayak + intro by Giulia Saccogna, Programme & Research Coordinator

Thu 4 Jul 18:20

Silent Cinema: The Light of Asia + intro by Cary Rajinder Sawhney, Director of London Indian Film Festival

Sun 7 Jul 15:10

Projecting the Archive: Action for Slander + intro by Josephine Botting, BFI National Archive Curator

Tue 23 Jul 18:15

Experimenta: Snakeskin + intro by by Hyun Jin Cho, BFI London Film Festival programmer

Thu 25 Jul 18:20

Relaxed Screening: Eraserhead + intro and discussion

Mon 29 Jul 18:10

BFI PLAYER

We are always open online on BFI Player where you can watch the best new, cult & classic cinema on demand. Showcasing hand-picked landmark British and independent titles, films are available to watch in three distinct ways: Subscription, Rentals & Free to view.

See something different today on player.bfi.org.uk

BFI SOUTHBANK

Welcome to the home of great film and TV, with three cinemas and a studio, a world-class library, regular exhibitions and a pioneering Mediatheque with 1000s of free titles for you to explore. Browse special-edition merchandise in the BFI Shop.

We're also pleased to offer you a unique new space, the BFI Riverfront – with unrivalled riverside views of Waterloo Bridge and beyond, a delicious seasonal menu, plus a stylish balcony bar for cocktails or special events. Come and enjoy a pre-cinema dinner or a drink on the balcony as the sun goes down.

When she was hired by British International Pictures in July 1927 it was considered a 'scoop' for the company, as Balfour's success was now just as great in France and Germany and BIP was hoping to reach European markets with its product. At BIP, she starred with Syd Chaplin in the delightful comedy *A Little Bit of Fluff* (Wheeler Dryden, 1928). At the same studio she also worked with Alfred Hitchcock on *Champagne* (1928) where she played a flapper. She was a versatile actress though and also took on more serious roles.

The Vagabond Queen was an attempt by BIP to reach international markets with a quality product, and the film looks beautiful with cinematography by Charles Rosher, Mary Pickford's cameraman and the photographer for F.W. Murnau's *Sunrise*. Like her 'Squibs' character, Balfour plays Sally as a feisty working class heroine. Easily insulted, she gets into a hilarious vegetable fight with some kids by a street market. Gutsy and impassioned Balfour is a delight to watch, in particular during the procession finale, where Sally comes perilously close to death due to numerous assassination attempts of which she remains blissfully unaware. Another amusing detail in the film is the surreal images of pigs and goats running about the sets at Elstree studios.

Balfour's popularity waned with the introduction of sound film yet although the fan magazine *Picturegoer* warned that Balfour (along with other British stars Mabel Poulton and Annette Benson) did not have a voice suitable for sound films this is untrue. She has a perfect voice and is wonderful in a supporting role to Jessie Matthews in the musical *Evergreen* (Victor Saville, 1934).

Her last film was in 1945, after a hiatus of almost a decade. After a failed stage comeback in 1952, she attempted suicide, and was a recluse for the last 20 years of her life.

Kelly Robinson and Ingrid Stigsdotter

Long Fliv the King

This short features the hilarious Charley Chase, with Oliver Hardy and Max Davidson. Another fine spoof of Ruritanian life.