



### The Merry Monarch

Director: Alexis Granowsky

Production Company:

Tobis-Sascha Filmindustrie

Production: Algra Film, SEPIC Film

Production Manager: Asarow

Assistant Director: L. Asarch

Screenplay: Fernand Crommelynck \*,

Henri Jeanson \*

Dialogue: Clifford Grey

Author of the Original Work: Pierre Louÿs

Photography: Rudolph Maté

Camera Assistant: Louis Née \*

Editor: P. Falkenberg

Set Designer: Marcel Vertès

Set Decorator: Pierre Schildknecht \*

Costumes: Marcel Vertès

Music: Carol Rathaus

English Dialogues and Lyrics by: Clifford Grey

Musical Director: Schroeder

Choreography: Léonide Massine \*

Sound-engineer: Storr

Cast:

Sidney Fox (*Queen Diane*)

Emil Jannings (*King Pausole*)

Armand Bernard (*Taxis, Minister of the Police*)

Josette Day

(*Princess Aline, Pausole's daughter*)

José Noguero (*Giglio, the aviator*)

Rachel Devirys (*Perchuque*)

Dorothy Boyd

Iris Ashley

Nita Harvey

Enid Menhinick

Grazia Del Rio (*Queen Fanette*)

Jacqueline Daix

Nane Germon (*Nicole*) \*

Austria-France 1933

73 mins

35mm

\* Uncredited

A BFI National Archive nitrate print

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**SIGHT AND SOUND**

### Projecting the Archive

# The Merry Monarch

+ intro by Josephine Botting, BFI Curator

**SPOILER WARNING** The following notes give away some of the plot.

### Contemporary reviews

Emil Jannings as a jovial royal buffoon in a fantasy-extravaganza. It is really a great lark, the production and direction of a story essentially a flight of imagination, making the whole film an essay in the sublimely ridiculous. Not the conventional box-office proposition, but good fun for enthusiasts seeking something 'different'.

Evidently films of this type have a surer appeal to Continental audiences, but this one can only be considered as a gamble over here, where the average cinegoer is primarily concerned with material facts and not anything too imaginative. It has a story which in many respects resembles that of *The Arcadians* and, in point of fact, can be classified as a cinematic opera-bouffe.

It is laid in a mythical kingdom where King Pausole's 366 wives (one for each day) lead a Utopian existence, disporting themselves in joyful frolic amidst arcadian surroundings. The only fly in the ointment is Taxis, Head Eunuch, whose strict supervision casts a shadow over their sunny lives. The arrival of a stranger aeronaut, who falls in love with the king's one and only daughter, is the spark which kindles the flame of revolt in the queens.

As a distinct change, the film has many points in its favour, but the fundamental theme and the structure of it are not in accord with the trend of popular taste. It is very bright and amusing, beautifully photographed and upholstered, to say nothing of the general air of 'aren't we having fun' caused by the graceful curvettings of the concubines. It can best be defined as a very good subject for specialised audiences.

*The Era*, 5 July 1933

'It's an ill wind...' You must forgive me if I begin these notes with this old platitude, but it serves my purpose most admirably.

Hitler has decided to exile from Germany all the brains of the Film Industry. Paris has captured Erich Pommer – for the time being, at any rate. There is little doubt Hollywood will offer him a lucrative job.

London has the opportunity of adding to its shortlist of competent directors the name of Alexis Granowski. Unless you are a student of the European Theatre the name will mean nothing. To tell you that he was the director of the world-famous Moscow Jewish Art Theatre may be no great recommendation. The films he has directed in Russia and Germany have not been shown in this country. The picture he made recently in Paris will be at the Empire, Leicester Square, next week. It is *The Merry Monarch*, based on Pierre Louÿs' famous novel, *Adventures of King Pausole*.

Those of you who have read the book will agree with me that an English version of the story is out of the question. The fantasy and the satire of a king who has 366 queens – a wife for each day in the year, even in Leap Year – cannot be worked out satisfactorily in accordance with the morality required by our Film Industry.

Therefore, I give due warning that the story may disappoint you. But anybody with half an eye will see that the direction of the film is masterly. The music, the décor, the costumes, and the settings have been woven into a series of lovely pictures.

It means that, given the right subject, Granowski will produce a film that will be a credit to our studios.

*Daily Herald*, 10 July 1933

## Regular Programme

### Woman with a Movie Camera Preview:

#### An Army of Women

Thu 10 Apr 20:30

#### Restored: The Wife's Confession (aka A Wife Confesses)

Tsuma wa kokuhaku suru

Tue 15 Apr 18:10

#### Experimenta: Under the Tower Trilogy by

William Raban + William Raban in

conversation

Thu 24 Apr 18:00

#### Filmmaking for Artists

Sun 27 Apr 10:30-17:00

#### Relaxed Screening: E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial

+ discussion

Mon 28 Apr 18:00

#### Restored: Nightshift

+ intro by Jon Jost,

filmmaker, cinematographer and friend of

Robina Rose

Tue 13 May 18:20

#### Silent Cinema: 100 Years of Film as Art:

##### Celebrating the Centenary of The Film

Society + intro by BFI National Archive curator

Bryony Dixon

Sun 18 May 15:20

#### Relaxed Screening: Pariah

+ discussion

Mon 19 May 18:35

#### Projecting the Archive: Sleeping Car

+ intro

Tue 20 May 18:15

#### Touchez pas au grisbi

Hands Off the Loot

+ intro by Professor Ginette Vincendeau,

Emeritus Professor in Film Studies, King's

College London

Fri 23 May 15:00

#### Experimenta: Nicky Hamlyn: Cycles of Time

+ Nicky Hamlyn in conversation with BFI

National Archive curator William Fowler

Thu 29 May 18:10

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Pierre Louys' novel has its niche in literature as a picture of licentiousness carried to its logical conclusion and as a setting for the genuinely and humanly amusing character of Pausole. The film of *The Merry Monarch* has neither logic nor characterisation. It is worth considering here only because of its 'artistic' pretensions.

Four notable changes are made in the screen translation:

(1) Mirabelle is, inevitably, no longer a lesbian; yet she unnecessarily appears on about three occasions. There are other discrepancies of this kind, and at least one serious gap in the narrative. Presumably the censor has been at work, but if the film were deemed worth showing in its cut version, then it would also have been worthwhile to refashion it as a coherent unity.

(2) Giglio has become an aviator who discovers the land of Tryphême. This was a happy invention, for it could make him a representative of the audience, delighted with the principles of this new country, and demanding that they should be universally applied. His character, however, is ruined by the attempted serious delineation of his love affair with Aline.

(3) At the end of the film, Pausole announces his conversion to monogamy through the ministrations of Queen Diane! (This is after Pausole and Diane have been lost at sea, being unable to locate Tryphême because it does not appear on any of the world's maps. An interesting addition but introduced and disposed of far too perfunctorily.)

(4) The indecision at the basis of Pausole's character is nowhere hinted at, and the domination of Taxis becomes immediately ridiculous. The king of *The Merry Monarch* is merely a *bon viveur*; the king of *Les Aventures du Roi Pausole* is the one character in the book who is created in the reader's own image. The puppet-performances that come from English and American, and now German, studios make us more than ever willing to see a film of human character. Here was a great opportunity.

For the last three of these changes the censor cannot be held responsible.

*The Merry Monarch* has been praised for the agreeable patterns of its camerawork, but the director has apparently no eye for significant detail. His obtuseness in this respect is revealed notably in the flat filming of the ballet: not a single detail is brought out by camera position or angle. An attention to significant detail, however, presupposes a respect for one's subject matter. And it seems impossible that anyone could feel respect for the mixture of crudity and conventionality that is *The Merry Monarch*.

Clifford Leech, 'Adaptation: An Example', *Cinema Quarterly*, Autumn 1933

## Location report from the French version (starring André Berley)

Finally, an entire palace in Cap d'Ail was transformed into the grand headquarters for the filming of *The Merry Monarch*. More than 200 people lived there, collaborating on the making of the great film, which Alexis Granowsky recorded in marvellous surrounding properties amidst lush vegetation, providing dream settings for this land of Tryphême imagined by Pierre Louys. Marcel Vertès – who designed the costumes and sets for this production – is also present with the film's protagonists André Berley and Armand Bernard, and with King Pausole's 366 ravishing wives. Rudolph Maté and Louis Née are delighted to have the sun as their only source of sunlight, and good humour reigns over the entire troupe despite the crushing heat, with the same good-natured authority that Pausole displays when governing his scantily clad subjects.

*L'ami du film, du spectacle et du radio*, no. 52, 26 August 1932