



Silent Cinema
UK Premiere of 4K Restoration

The Garden of Eden

The Garden of Eden

Director: Lewis Milestone

Production Company: Feature Productions

Presented by: Walter Morosco

Producer: John W. Considine Jr

Scenario: Hans Kräly

Titles: George Marion Jr

Based on the play by: Rudolf Bernauer,

Rudolf Oesterreicher

Photography: John Arnold

Editor: John Orlando

Set Designer: William Cameron Menzies

Cast:

Hank Mann (*railroad conductor*)

Corinne Griffith (*Toni LeBrun*)

Louise Dresser (*Rosa*)

Lowell Sherman (*Henry von Glessing*)

Maude George (*Madame Bauer*)

Charles Ray (*Richard Spanyi*)

Edward Martindel (*Colonel Dupont*)

Freeman Wood (*musical director*)

USA 1928

80 mins

Digital 4K (restoration)

With live accompaniment by Stephen Horne

Restored in 4K in 2025 by San Francisco Film Preserve. In collaboration with George Eastman Museum, Library of Congress and The Maltese Film Works. Funding provided by Sunrise Foundation for Education and the Arts.

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+ intro by Bryony Dixon, Curator, BFI National Archive

A film of and about deceptive appearances, *The Garden of Eden* starts as a Viennese drama but soon morphs into a Riviera comedy. Its script was penned by Hans Kraly, Ernst Lubitsch's collaborator on 30 films, and was briskly directed by Lewis Milestone in a joyful, light-hearted mood.

Corinne Griffith plays Toni, a young woman raised by her baker guardians in Vienna. Unsatisfied with baking pretzels for life, she dreams of becoming an opera singer. She departs for Budapest, under the impression she is auditioning for a serious singing role. However, on her first night on stage, Toni is shocked to discover – unbeknownst to her – that she has been dressed in a see-through costume. Further revelations follow: the venue is a disreputable music hall, and its patroness offers her girls to wealthy men. Disillusioned and pursued by a persistent rich man, Toni finds solace with the theatre's grandmotherly wardrobe mistress (Louise Dresser). The two women pack up and leave... for Monte Carlo. Even more surprises await: the wardrobe mistress is actually a baroness. They soon check into the Hotel Eden, a playground for the sexual escapades of the wealthy, lavishly designed by the film's art director and Milestone's frequent collaborator, William Cameron Menzies. The hotel sets the stage for a series of further revelations, culminating in the second half of this charming comedy.

The material could have easily been adapted into a screwball comedy in the sound era, and the film is undoubtedly ahead of its time. Milestone elaborates on some of his earlier *mise-en-scène* ideas, such as characters circling and being circled. Described by Milestone's biographer Harlow Robinson as the director's 'most successful romantic comedy', the original film featured a sequence in colour of which only a few frames have survived.

Ehsan Khoshbakht, Il Cinema Ritrovato 2025, ilcinemaritrovato.it

About the restoration

This restoration is based primarily on a 35mm print conserved at the George Eastman Museum, supplemented with frames from a 35mm preservation print conserved at the Library of Congress National Audio-Visual Conservation Center. The original release version of the film included a Technicolor dream sequence of 277 feet (84 meters), approximately three minutes. This sequence, a fantasy of Toni's imagined future life as an opera singer, occurs in the first reel and does not survive in any source. In accordance with archival restoration ethics, digital intervention was limited to mitigating damage and accumulated wear suffered by the original film materials. This restoration was completed in June 2025 by the San Francisco Film Preserve in collaboration with George Eastman Museum and the Library of Congress. This project was made possible through the wonderfully generous support of the Sunrise Foundation for Education and the Arts.

San Francisco Film Preserve, filmpreserve.org

Programme notes and credits compiled by Sight and Sound and the BFI Documentation Unit

Notes may be edited or abridged | Browse online at theb.fi/programme-notes

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