



Silent Cinema

Film Society 38

Secrets of Nature: Plants of the Underworld

Director: Mary Field

Production Company: British Instructional Films
UK 1930

11 mins

Digital

Cinderella

Director: Lotte Reiniger

Production Company: Institut für Kulturforschung

Collaborators: Carl Koch, Toni Raboldt

Verses specially written by: Humbert Wolfe

[Film Society version]

Based on the story by: The Brothers Grimm

Germany 1922

16 mins

35mm

The Seashell and the Clergyman

La coquille et le Clergyman

Director/Producer: Germaine Dulac

Assistant Director: Louis Ronjat

Screenplay: Antonin Artaud

Director of Photography: Paul Parguel

Camera Operator: Paul Guichard

Storyboard Artist: Antonin Artaud

Consultant: Yvonne Allendy

Cast:

Alex Allin (*the clergyman*)

Génica Athanasiou (*the woman*)

Lucien Bataille (*the officer*)

France 1928

40 mins

35mm

Peasant Women of Ryazan

Baby Riazanskije

Director: Olga Preobrazhenskaya

Production Company: First Studio Sovekino

Cast:

Emma Tsesarskaya

Raisa Pruzhnaya

K. Yastrebitsky

G. Bobynin

O. Narbekova

M. Savelyev

USSR 1927

67 mins

Digital

With live piano accompaniment by Meg Morley

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SIGHT AND SOUND

+ intro by BFI National Archive curator Bryony Dixon and guests

We have been proudly championing the work of women filmmakers for many years at the BFI. But we were not the first to do so. The Film Society, a pioneering organisation of cinephiles, addressed the issue as early as 1930, in their 38th edition. It consisted solely of films produced or directed by women. Not all of these survive – we have lost films by Dorothy Arzner and Dinah Shurey – but we have enough to present, for the first time since 1930, this celebration of the women who featured in that groundbreaking programme.

Secrets of Nature: Plants of the Underworld

Mary Field was born in Wimbledon, London, in 1896 and trained as a teacher and historian. Visiting British Instructional studios in late 1925 as an historical adviser for one of their films, she was offered a post as education manager. Within a year she had become a member of the production staff, learning editing, continuity, scriptwriting and direction on educational, documentary and feature films. By 1927 she was working with the cinematographer Percy Smith on the pioneering natural history series *Secrets of Nature* (1922-33), a forerunner to the wildlife television programmes of today. Compared with the sophisticated technology available to contemporary filmmakers, the equipment used by Field and Smith was cumbersome and noisy, making the results they achieved all the more remarkable. In 1929, Field became the *Secrets of Nature* series editor, continuing to direct many films herself, including the zoological series.

When British Instructional was taken over in 1933, Field moved to the newly created educational unit, Gaumont-British Instructional. With her old employer from British Instructional, Bruce Woolfe, she started a new nature series, *Secrets of Life* (1934-1950). Field also directed films for geography, history, language, physical education and hygiene syllabuses in schools and promoted the educational use of film on various committees.

Sarah Easen, BFI Screenonline

Cinderella

With *Cinderella*, an expressionistic stroke of genius, Lotte Reiniger again turned to a fairy tale: '...an artistic masterpiece. Its atmosphere has been captured here, with its naïve romanticism and inherent humour. Each silhouette exhibits distinct character which brings to life the essence of the fairy tale figure.' (*Filmkurier*, 9 March 1923). The fairy tale of the prince who is looking for the mysterious beauty, an outcast within her family, has gone through several film versions. Apart from the Brothers Grimm, there is Perrault's courtly version. The Czech writer Božena Němcová wrote a charming adaptation with emancipatory echoes, which has long since become a classic thanks to Václav Vorlíček's film *Drei Nüsse für Aschenbrödel* (US version: *Three Wishes for Cinderella*). Lotte Reiniger's silent expressionist film version of 1922 is based on the Grimm Brothers' version.

The English release version was born of the initiative of Eric Walter White, a friend of Lotte Reiniger and Carl Koch. The English intertitles were written by

Regular Programme

Projecting the Archive: Latin Quarter (aka

Frenzy) + intro by Jason Morell, actor and son of Joan Greenwood

Tue 9 Jun 18:10

Woman with a Movie Camera: Grace of My Heart

+ intro by Grace Barber-Plentie, BFI Festivals

Film Programmer

Fri 12 Jun 18:15

Experimenta: Experimental Cinema Structures, Systems and Strategies

+ writer and artist Simon Payne in conversation with BFI National Archive

curator William Fowler

Thu 18 Jun 18:10

Seniors' Free Matinee:

A Dry White Season + intro

Mon 22 Jun 14:00

Relaxed Screening: How to Marry a Millionaire

+ intro and discussion

Mon 29 Jun 18:30

Re-releases

The Misfits

From Fri 5 Jun

Pink Narcissus + pre-recorded intro by

Todd Wiener, UCLA Archivist

From Fri 12 Jun

Boogie Nights

From Fri 12 Jun

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Humbert Wolfe, but the title cards were designed by Reiniger herself in London and inserted into the movie later.

'A Lotte Reiniger film in London. A six-year-old film by Lotte Reiniger, *Cinderella* is currently being shown in several London cinemas with great success. The first screening of the film took place at an event of the Film Society and received great acclaim.' (*Filmkurier*, 22 December 1927)

In 1954, Reiniger created *Cinderella* once more, this time as a sound film.

Christel Strobel, *Lotte Reiniger: The Fairy Tale Films* DVD booklet (BFI, 2009)

The Seashell and the Clergyman

Germaine Dulac remains best remembered for *The Seashell and the Clergyman*, banned in Britain after the BBFC called it 'so cryptic as to be almost meaningless', adding that 'if it has a meaning, it is doubtless objectionable'. Its meaning was hotly contested: according to legend, it sparked a near-riot at its premiere in February 1928 as various surrealists objected to differences between her film and Antonin Artaud's scenario about a priest who lusts after a general's wife – despite Artaud recording his satisfaction with Dulac's interpretation.

Before moving into film in 1915, Dulac edited the feminist review *La Française* and wrote plays. She established herself with *The Smiling Madame Beudet* (1922), a feminist work about a smart woman in a loveless marriage, and impressed critics with *L'Invitation au voyage* (1927). *The Seashell and the Clergyman's* poetic qualities shine through: with its simmering sexuality, dreamlike overlays and fractured perspectives, it remains the most sensuous attempt to transfer the surrealist sensibility into cinema.

Juliet Jacques, *Sight and Sound*, October 2015

Peasant Women of Ryazan

This was the most important film made by Olga Preobrazhenskaya, a Russian film pioneer and one of the first women in Europe to stand behind a camera. After beginning as a theatre actress, she made her cinema debut in *The Keys to Happiness* (1913), directed by Vladimir Gardin and Yakov Protazanov, before becoming the first female Russian film director in 1916 when she made *Miss Peasant*, a film version of the famous short story by Alexander Pushkin. Shot in the village of Sapozhok, which has remained unchanged for three hundred years, *The Peasant Women of Ryazan* was the first collaboration between herself and Ivan Pravov, but she was definitely the dominant partner in the duo, with her decision to cast debutants Emma Tsesarskaya and Raisa Puzhnaya in the main roles particularly successful. Although this very popular movie touched on rural themes, as was desired by Soviet propaganda, it still found itself criticised for its insufficiently progressive stance; today, this lack of a propaganda load, so characteristic of movies of the time, is to the film's advantage.

17th Silent Cinema Festival, Filмотека Narodowa