

The Museum of Modern Art Department of Film

11 West 53 Street, New York, N.Y. 10019 Tel: 212-708-9400 Cable: MODERNART Telex: 62370 MODART

#82

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

THE DEPARTMENT OF FILM LEADS OFF 50TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION WITH TOUR OF SILENT FILM CLASSIC WAY DOWN EAST

Restored Masterwork to Play with Musical Accompaniment at Festivals Here and Abroad

The Museum of Modern Art has made available its recently restored version of Way Down East, D.W. Griffith's classic melodrama, to leading film festivals in 1985. Showings of the film, to be presented with live performances of the original musical score, will help mark the 50th anniversary year of the Museum's Department of Film. The first screening is scheduled for January 23 at the United States Film Festival, sponsored by Sundance Institute. Two more special presentations will take place on February 6 and 7 at the Mary Pickford Theater in the Library of Congress.

"Fine naturalistic acting by Lillian Gish, Griffith's ability to evoke feeling, and the ultimate in exciting last-minute rescues made Way Down East Griffith's most popular film after The Birth of a Nation," notes Eileen Bowser, Curator of the Museum's Film Archive. And yet Way Down East was not seen in its integral form for over sixty years after its premiere in 1920. Shortly after the film's release, Griffith began to re-edit it. As Peter Williamson, Technical Co-Ordinator for MoMA's Film Archive, has explained, "The film was shortened by one-quarter. Entire scenes were eliminated, characters vanished, titles were rewritten. A sound track was added that destroyed part of the image." By the time the Museum received the film in the late 1930s, it was only a shadow of itself. No print of the original could be found.

The Museum undertook the restoration of Way Down East in 1979, seeking to assemble an integral version as close as possible to Griffith's original film and to preserve the tinting that had contributed so greatly to the visual impact of the work. Williamson had to work with no fewer than four different prints in reassembling the film, two of them from MoMA's Archive, two from private collectors who offered the Museum tinted nitrate prints from the mid-1920s. The problem was to figure out the correct sequence of scenes, piece them together, and make the result look as if it had come from one source rather than four.

Here the Library of Congress entered with two invaluable resources: a detailed shot analysis that Griffith had deposited as part of his copyright registration in 1920, and the expert advice of Gillian Anderson, Music Specialist in the Library's Music Division. By comparing the film's original musical score with the shot analysis,

more/

Anderson and Williamson were able to confirm that all of the shots listed in the copyright registration had indeed been seen in the first screenings of Way Down East. In this way, Williamson could be sure that various footage in his hands was essential to the film and not just a collection of outtakes. He also could be sure of the correct sequence of scenes, since the shot analysis and the musical score matched. The restored version of the film premiered at MoMA in June 1984, with piano accompaniment performed by Stuart Oderman; the restoration is only some five minutes short of the estimated length of the original.

"Griffith was musically quite knowledgeable," Gillian Anderson comments, "and the music for Way Down East reflects the close control he exerted over the score. The restoration worked out this well partly because Griffith did in fact orchestrate the music so closely with the images." Because the musical score--composed and arranged by Louis Silvers and William Frederick Peters--is so integral to the film, the Museum is encouraging film festivals to present Way Down East with the original score as restored by Anderson. For the screenings at the Library of Congress on February 6 and 7, pianist Christine Niehaus will perform the 2 1/2-hour score, working from a conductor's guide called a piano short score. For the screening at the United States Film Festival in January, the score will be performed in its orchestral version by the Salt Lake Chamber Ensemble under the direction of Rick Nobis.

Tony Safford, Managing Director of the United States Film Festival, comments that "We look at this screening as a tremendous opportunity to show a major historical film that brings to the forefront the urgency of film preservation." Now about to begin its seventh season, the Festival has a primary commitment to American independent cinema. But, as Safford notes, part of that commitment involves "the recognition of the importance of film history as a living presence for today's filmmakers. With Way Down East, we have a film that is of great historical significance. And, because of its restoration, it is also a film that points up the crucial importance of preserving film history." The Festival will present Way Down East at the turn-of-the-century Egyptian Theater in Park City, Utah, on January 23.

By making Way Down East available, the Department of Film is both celebrating its 50th anniversary and dramatizing the ongoing commitment of archives around the world to the campaign for film preservation. Founded in 1935 as the Film Library, the Department of Film has been among the leaders in promoting public awareness of the art of film. It assembled the first film collection in any art museum, actively seeking donations at a time when most films virtually disappeared following their

The Museum of Modern Art Department of Film

initial release. The Department also has sought to bring films of every variety before the public through an ambitious exhibitions program and its Circulating Film Library, which serves colleges and universities; it serves scholars through the Pinewood International Film Study Center and is currently expanding its publications program. During the 50th anniversary year, the Department will concentrate its efforts on a drive to complete the transferral of its Film Archive from unstable, nitrate-based stock to modern safety stock. The presentation of Way Down East at festivals in the United States and abroad gives the Department the opportunity to make the case for film preservation in the most vivid and accessible manner possible.

Future festival dates for Way Down East are being arranged by Adrienne Mancia, Curator, and Stephen Harvey, Assistant Curator, in the Exhibitions Program of MoMA's Department of Film. The restoration of Way Down East was undertaken by Peter Williamson, Technical Co-Ordinator, under the supervision of Eileen Bowser, Curator of the Museum's Film Archive; the project as a whole has been overseen by Mary Lea Bandy, Director of the Department of Film. The Museum is indebted to Gillian Anderson in the Music Division of the Library of Congress and to Paul Spehr, Assistant Chief of the Motion Picture, Broadcast, and Recorded Sound Division of the Library of Congress. Thanks are also due to Robert Saudek, Chief of the Motion Picture Division. The presentation of Way Down East at the Library of Congress has been arranged by Scott Simmon, Curator of the Mary Pickford Theater. The presentation at the United States Film Festival was arranged by Tony Safford, Managing Director of the Festival.

December 1984

March 4: KEN FEINGOLD, "To Intelligently Use of Time." An associate professor at the Minneapolis College of Art and Design, Feingold uses images from the mass media to construct engaging, sometimes soulful works on the borderling between narrative and non-narrative art. He will show The Double (a recent work) and 55in/MIND

March 18: BOB SNYDER, "Video Colorization Based on Musical Models." Snyder, who teaches sound at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and shares the instruction of Chicago video artists in image processing, will show his new work Spectral Brands in which the soundtrack and use of color are both based on the same structural ideas

April 15: DICK HALL, "Image as Spectrality." An artist and teacher at the San Francisco Art Institute, Hall was most recently seen at MoMA in the SCUM

 For further PRESS information, please contact Stuart Klawans, Film Press Representative,
 The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York, NY 10019 (212) 708-9752.
