

The Museum of Modern Art

West 53 Street, New York, N.Y. 10019 Tel. 956-6100 Cable: Modernart

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CHARLES HOFMANN TO LECTURE ON MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT TO SILENT FILMS

Music for silent films will be the subject of a noon lecture, Wednesday January 28, by Charles Hofmann, at The Museum of Modern Art. Mr. Hofmann is Music Director of the Department of Film at the Museum, and the lecture will be illustrated by excerpts from D. W. Griffith, Eisenstein, and from pictures starring Douglas Fairbanks. Mr. Hofmann is also the author of "Sounds for Silents," to be published this month by DBS Publications, with a foreward by Lillian Gish. It deals with the history of musical accompaniment to films from 1900 to 1930, and includes cue sheets and many film scores which have never been published before.

Mr. Hofmann has played his own original accompaniment to D. W. Griffith's "Birth of a Nation" about forty times. The original piano score incorporated over one hundred compositions, including Grieg's "Hall of the Mountain King," which was played to the burning of Atlanta. One of the melodies used in the film, Breil's "The Perfect Song," later became the theme song of the "Amos 'n Andy" radio show in the 1930's.

The Museum of Modern Art is the only institution in the world that employs a full-time piano accompanist for its silent films. In addition, seventy-five to one hundred original scores from silent movies are circulated by the Department of Film of the Museum, which services universities and film study groups throughout the country.

The only professional accompanist for silent films, Charles Hofmann first played in movie theaters as a teen-ager in Tampa, Florida. His real ambition, however, was to be a writer, and he has published two books on the American Indian. While researching these books and lecturing at the Museum of Natural

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History, he conducted music shows on the radio. Resuming his former interest in the 1950's, he began to play at film societies. In March, 1967 he succeeded Arthur Kleiner as The Museum of Modern Art's Music Director.

As an accompanist Mr. Hofmann plays his own original compositions. In the past, he points out, familiar music was used -- a practice which now, in the age of radio and recordings, tends to distract from the picture. He prefers improvising to playing a melody he knows, and watches the films rather than the cue sheets, in order to provide the appropriate accompaniment for a particular scene. This "instant composing" has become a lost art, giving way to more carefully arranged scores for sound films, with the exception of those silent films for which Charles Hofmann has created piano scores.

Additional information available from Lillian Gerard, Film Coordinator, and Elizabeth Shaw, Director, Department of Public Information, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53rd Street, New York, N.Y. 10019. (212) 956 - 7296, 7501.