

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

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Film List

No. 8

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In honor of Jean Renoir's 30th year in motion pictures the Museum of Modern Art Film Library, 11 West 53 Street, will present a special program of work by the distinguished French director during the week beginning February 1. Each program will be shown for one day only at 3 and 5:30 in the Museum Auditorium.

The following films will be shown:

- Feb. 1: LA PETITE MARCHANDE D'ALLUMETTES (1927), with Catherine Hesseling.
UNE PARTIE DE CAMPAGNE (1938), after Maupassant with Sylvie Bataille,
- Feb. 2: LA CHIENNE (1931), written by Renoir, with Michel Simon.
- Feb. 3: GRAND ILLUSION (1937), with Jean Gabin, Pierre Fresnay, Erich von Stroheim.
- Feb. 4: THE LOWER DEPTHS (1936), after Gorki, with Jean Gabin, Louis Jouvet.
- Feb. 5: TIRE AU FLANC (1928), scenario by Jean Renoir and Claude Heyman, with
Michel Simon.
- Feb. 6: To be announced.
- Feb. 7: DIARY OF A CHAMBERMAID (1946), with Burgess Meredith, Paulette Goddard,
Judith Anderson.

In announcing the retrospect, Richard Griffith, Curator of the Museum of Modern Art Film Library, said:

"In this retrospect of the work of Jean Renoir, the Film Library is privileged to present for the first time in the United States Renoir's LA CHIENNE, and two representatives of the director's work in the silent era, almost unknown in this country, LA PETITE MARCHANDE D'ALLUMETTES, after Hans Christian Anderson, and TIRE AU FLANC, which marked Michel Simon's screen debut. His version of Zola's LA BÊTE HUMAINE, LA RÈGLE DU JEU, and TONI, one of his masterpieces, unhappily, are missing; prints could not be obtained in time for the retrospect.

"While Jean Renoir and his work are regarded with admiration and respect by film-makers everywhere, his films have seemed to many to lie somewhat outside the historical development of cinematography. His subjects and styles have been so various - from the naturalism of TONI, directed much in the manner of his friends and Robert Flaherty, to the avant-garde artifice of LA PETITE MARCHANDE D'ALLUMETTES and the "period" artificiality of his mordant and equivocal DIARY OF A CHAMBERMAID - that film enthusiasts have had a hard time deciding, even to their own satisfaction, whether there is a "Renoir style" at all. On this point, Renoir's friend and collaborator, J. B. Brunius, comments illuminatingly in a program note written for the Film Society of London:

"He is the only French director (and I mean the only one) who can really be called an artist in the best sense of the word. Not an aesthete, not an intellectual, but an artist like his father Auguste...This explains his unevenness, his mistakes. Renoir is purely and simply an artist, not a technician - like Clair who is both, or Feyder and Carne who are above all technicians. At his best he beats them all because his urge for self-expression causes him to invent spontaneously a new technique for himself.

"This is why his films, successful or not, always bear his mark, the mark of a powerful personality, and yet have no definite style. There is no Renoir style or rather there is a different one for each film. But Renoir himself is always there with his idiosyncrasies, his

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loves and hates, his sensitivity, his aims.

"I do not wish to give the impression that Renoir lacks certain fixed ideas with regard to technique or aesthetics. They are seldom mentioned because Renoir is not given to theorizing or self-publicity...For instance, long before it was fashionable to attribute the innovation of deep focus to Orson Welles or Gregg Toland, Renoir was much concerned about the trend towards large lens aperture and soft focus. This photographic amputation prevented him, he said, from setting one actor in the foreground and another in the background of the same scene. When we were preparing *PARTIE DE CAMPAGNE* in the summer of 1936, it was decided that as the film was to be shot almost entirely in exteriors with plenty of sunlight (we hoped) we should use old-fashioned sharp focus lenses. With great difficulty we finally got hold of a few Zeiss and a Bosch and Lomb f3.5 which allowed Renoir to beat the so-called innovators by nearly ten years. He didn't boast about it, because he did not consider it as an innovation but rather dating from the thirties...in *THE SOUTHERNER*, Renoir again uses the technique to which he attached so much importance in *PARTIE DE CAMPAGNE*, shaded foreground, sunlit background, in order to emphasize the distance between the actors."

"This concentration of interest in the pictorial aspects of cinematography has increased in his two color films. *THE RIVER* seemed less a film version of a novel than an essay in color composition under the Indian sun, and Renoir employs much the same approach to the provincial Peruvian splendours and the Commedia dell'Arte troupe of *THE GOLDEN COACH* which will have its New York premiere January 21. While some of his films, such as his world-famous *GRAND ILLUSION*, pivot on dialogue, and while none of them with the possible exception of *PARTIE DE CAMPAGNE* owes anything directly to painting, the body of Renoir's work makes clear that he conceives problems of film composition as the traditional problems of a pictorial art.

"The Film Library gratefully acknowledges the help of the Cinemathèque Française, through which *LA PETITE MARCHAND D'ALLUMETTES*, *PARTIE DE CAMPAGNE*, *LA CHIENNE*, and *TIRE AU FLANC* were secured for the retrospect; and thanks Mr. James Stacy for his kind permission to show *DIARY OF A CHAMBERMAID*."