

The Museum of Modern Art

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THE FILMS OF JOSEF VON STERNBERG by Andrew Sarris. 56 pages, 27 illustrations. Hardbound, \$4.95; paperbound, \$2.95. Published by The Museum of Modern Art, New York; hardbound edition distributed to the trade by Doubleday and Co., Inc.

The first comprehensive critical survey of Josef von Sternberg's films has just been published by The Museum of Modern Art. In THE FILMS OF JOSEF VON STERNBERG, Andrew Sarris estimates the career and reputation of the famous director, analyzing Sternberg's contribution to cinema, his concern with style, his pictorial sense and his views of romantic love. Twenty-seven photographs, both film stills and shots taken on location, supplement the text.

Born in Vienna in 1894, Josef von Sternberg came to New York and entered the film business as a film patcher for the World Film Company in 1914. He progressed to film cutter, editor, writer and assistant director, and in 1925, he launched his directorial career with THE SALVATION HUNTERS. Mr. Sarris traces the development of his cinematic techniques in his early films (SALVATION HUNTERS, UNDERWORLD, THE LAST COMMAND) through the period of his famous association with Marlene Dietrich (THE BLUE ANGEL, MOROCCO, DISHONORED, SHANGHAI EXPRESS, BLONDE VENUS, THE SCARLET EMPRESS, and THE DEVIL IS A WOMAN) to his later work (SHANGHAI GESTURE, 1941, and ANATAHAN, 1953).

It is Mr. Sarris' thesis that Sternberg was in many ways ahead of his time in that he is more concerned with elemental human relations than with storytelling. "Sternberg has always been less interested in men and their societies than in men and women, or more precisely, in man's confrontation of the myths of womanhood, the underlying theme of Sternbergian cinema...." Although critics have often subordinated von Sternberg's art to the mystique of Marlene Dietrich, Mr. Sarris points out that the director's concept of the feminine mystique neither originated nor disappeared with Dietrich but is mirrored in the roles of his other leading ladies throughout his career as a director.

Sternberg was criticized by his contemporaries for an insufficient grasp of his

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own time and place, but Mr. Sarris observes that, "It is only when we look around at the allegedly significant cinema of Sternberg's contemporaries that we recognize the relative stature of a director who chose to write with a camera in the first person.... Sternberg's films are poetic without being symbolic. We need not search for slumbering allegories of Man and God and Life, but rather for a continuous stream of emotional autobiography."

These ideas about the nature of cinema are reflected in the director's technique, which is primarily visual. All his films demonstrate his preoccupation with the production arts and physical reality. "In a sense, Sternberg entered the cinema through the camera rather than the cutting room and thus became a lyricist of light and shadow rather than a master of montage."

Andrew Sarris is film critic for The Village Voice and has a weekly program, "Films in Focus," for radio station WBAI in New York. A frequent contributor to periodicals and a lecturer and panelist, Mr. Sarris was a member of the Program Committee for the fourth New York Film Festival at Lincoln Center. Mr. Sarris selected sixteen of von Sternberg's films for showing at The Museum of Modern Art last year.

THE FILMS OF JOSEF VON STERNBERG contains notes on all the director's films, including those never completed, and a brief bibliography. It is published in two editions: paperbound, \$2.95, and hardbound, \$4.95, both available by mail from the Museum or at the Museum Bookstore. Trade distribution of the hardbound edition is through Doubleday and Co., Inc.

The Museum of Modern Art has also published a portfolio, JOSEF VON STERNBERG: TEN STILLs, with brief comments by Eileen Bowser, Assistant Curator of the Museum's Department of Film (\$3.95). Other important Museum books on the film include D. W. GRIFFITH: AMERICAN FILM MASTER by Iris Barry and THE FILM INDEX: A BIBLIOGRAPHY, re recently published for the Museum by the Arno Press.

Review copies, photographs and additional information available from Elizabeth Shaw, Director, and Patricia B. Kaplan, Assistant, Department of Public Information, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York, N. Y. 10019. Circle 5-8900.