

22

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 WEST 53RD STREET, NEW YORK

TELEPHONE: CIRCLE 7-7470

47-A

FOR RELEASE Saturday afternoon or
Sunday morning, January 4 or 5, 1936

The Museum of Modern Art Film Library announces the initial showing of its first program of motion pictures on January 7, 1936 at The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street. The program, which will be composed of six early movies, will then be circulated throughout the country, where it will be shown by colleges, museums and study groups to members. It will be followed by four additional programs which compose "A Brief Survey of the Film in America, 1895-1932." This will be the first time that a film series, selected and assembled by an educational institution, will be shown in chronological sequence for the purpose of studying the motion picture as an art.

The six motion pictures in the first program illustrate the development of narrative in the movies and begin with a fifty-foot reel entitled The Execution of Mary Queen of Scots. This was produced in 1893 in--or just outside--the first motion picture studio in America, the famous "Black Maria" built on the grounds of Thomas Edison's laboratory in West Orange, New Jersey. The Black Maria, cradle of the movies, was a tiny one-story, one-room building, used for the production of short subjects shown in the kinetoscope, Edison's peep show machine. The Execution of Mary Queen of Scots was a peep-show film but in February 1894 Jean A. LeRoy, film pioneer and inventor, succeeded in projecting it on a screen. *First projected on screen in 1895.*

Wash Day Troubles, produced in 1895, took the motion picture one step beyond the single dramatic incident shown in The Execution of Mary Queen of Scots. This little fifty-foot film relates a comic episode and is a forerunner of slapstick comedy on the screen.

A Trip to the Moon, produced and directed in 1902 by Georges Méliès in Paris, is one of the most remarkable of early motion pictures. Story, elaborate scenery, trick camera effects, and fantastic costumes are all by Méliès, the French master of the films who brought a Jules Verne imagination and the technical ability of a professional magician and illusionist to the screen. Produced in the

-2-

days when the average motion picture had a running time of not more than three minutes, A Trip to the Moon, 800 feet long, ran a full ten minutes. In addition to all his other contributions to the picture, Méliès played one of the principal characters in it. The cast also includes dancers from the Théâtre du Chatelet and acrobats from the Folies Bergères. A Trip to the Moon is a gay and charming turn-of-the-century frolic by plump dancers in thick white tights, long-bearded scientists, and fantastic moon creatures aided by highly ingenious scenic effects, all the elements worked into a dramatic sequence on the screen.

The next year--1903--Edwin S. Porter, cameraman for the Edison Company, wrote and directed for that Company an 800-foot film that made movie history. It was The Great Train Robbery, which has since become known as the first American motion picture with a plot. It might also be called the first on the gangster and G-Men cycles, as it combined the salient features of both those present-day screen classics with a touch of early Shirley Temple in the form of a curly-haired mite who first prayed over and then unbound the robbers' victim.

In about 1905 a two-reel (2,000 feet) motion picture of Faust was produced in France by Pathé. One of the interesting features of this film is the effort made to project the thought of a character by producing it in vision form on the screen background. When Marguerite recalls her meeting with Faust, a visionary scene of it replaces the tapestry on the wall behind the heroine.

"This is my one chance of immortality," said Sarah Bernhardt, when asked to appear in a screen play. She made Queen Elizabeth, four reels in 1911. This picture was produced and directed by Louis Mercanton and brought to this country the next year by Adolph Zukor as the first of the "Famous Plays with Famous Players" --forerunner of the organization we know today as Paramount. Although Queen Elizabeth is a photographed play rather than a motion picture proper, its success-- due largely to Bernhardt's world-wide prestige--helped establish the vogue of the long feature film.

A complete musical score, which has necessitated much research, has been arranged by the Museum of Modern Art Film Library to accompany the film program. For the first decade and a half of movie history the musical setting was left entirely to the discretion and talent of the lone piano player who functioned as a complete orchestra, improvising, synchronizing and providing sound effects all in one gesture. In spite

of personal variations in the hundreds of pianists who beat out airs on the tinny pianos of nickelodeon days, a general uniformity of style grew up--a tradition of movie music which consisted of the popular songs of the day, old-time parlor classics, and incidental music which ran--or rather accompanied--the gamut of emotion from heroic heart-throbs to basest villainy. Older members of the Film Library audience will probably remember some of the musical themes that accompany the first program. During the "chase" scenes of The Great Train Robbery, the old Ben Hur march will be played. It was often used in the nickelodeons as "rescue" music. Wash Day Troubles will be accompanied by that early comic gem known as Everybody Works But Father. For love scenes tender passages from After the Ball and other sentimental ballads of the day will be played. It is the aim of the Film Library to approximate as nearly as possible the contemporary musical settings of the films it will show on its programs.

The program The Development of Narrative which will have its initial showing at the Museum January 7, 1936, is the first of five programs in the Museum of Modern Art Film Library Series, No.1: "A Short Survey of the Film in America, 1895-1932." The second program in Series No. 1 will be The Rise of the American Film, which will be shown at the Museum February 4. Additional programs of Series No. 1 will be released by the Film Library in March, April and May. Immediately after showing at the Museum, each program will be started on an itinerary which will include museums, colleges and study groups throughout the country.

PHOTOGRAPHS ON REQUEST

For reproduction only, we will send you one or more of the following stills:

1. Scene from Wash Day Troubles
2. Fantastic moon creature from A Trip to the Moon
3. Scene from The Great Train Robbery
4. Scene from Faust
5. Scene from Queen Elizabeth, with Sarah Bernhardt.