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THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

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Theme music for early masterpieces of the movies is being written and adapted by the music department of the Museum of Modern Art Film Library, New York. Strains from Debussy accompany certain sequences of Gertie, the Dinosaur, an animated cartoon evolved by Winsor McCay in 1909; Vision of Salome and the Birth of Passion music from Madame Sherry audibly underline Theda Bara's more purple moments in A Fool There Was; and a popular song of the period, Day Dreams, is the recurrent musical theme of Mary Pickford's immensely popular picture produced in 1912--The New York Hat.

Because the discovery and arrangement of appropriate music for old motion pictures involves much time and labor, the Film Library will publish a complete musical score for every program of silent films it presents and will send the score with each program as it is circulated throughout the country. The score for the first program, which was presented at the Museum of Modern Art early in January, requires a book of one hundred seventeen pages. This was printed from handwritten sheets of music by a lithoprinting process, and resembles ordinary published music except that in addition to the usual musical instructions such as andante, con forza, cresc. molto and so on, the Film Library score indicates changes in the music to synchronize with the action of the motion picture it accompanies. For Queen Elizabeth, produced in 1911 and starring Sarah Bernhardt, the motion picture notations toward the end of the score, at intervals of from one to four pages, read: Elizabeth Signs Essex Death Warrant; Queen Visits Body of Essex; Queen Embraces Body of Essex; Sees Ring Missing; Queen Elizabeth Forces the Horrible Truth (play until Countess kneels); After the Death of Her Lover--which last instruction indicates the final change in the music until the end of the picture.

The method of fitting music to movie involves not only musical ability but patience, alertness and a stop watch held in the hand of Miss Alden Beach, composer, who recently returned from a year and half in Hollywood where she studied the relation of various kinds of music

to motion picture moods. Miss Beach, assisted by Mr. Theodore Huff, is the arranger of the Film Library's musical scores and in addition to searching out, adapting, combining and synchronizing the old music, she occasionally composes new bits to heighten emotional or dramatic effects. In the Mary Pickford picture, The New York Hat, Miss Beach has overlaid the thematic strain with "gossip" music which simulates the sound of gossipy voices, feminine and masculine. This is in true movie tradition, for as musical accompaniment grew with the motion picture it developed into distinct types known as "love music," "hurry music," "battle music," "mysterioso music," and so on.

Sigmund Spaeth, the "Tune Detective" who is probably this country's leading authority on the sources and periods of popular music, is keenly interested in the efforts of the Film Library to bring back the music of the past in its relation to early films. He has heard and approved several of the Film Library scores and has offered a number of valuable suggestions. Commenting on the work of the Library, Mr. Spaeth said: "The revival of these films is a very good way of reminding ourselves of the music that was popular at their time. The ear sometimes remembers what the eye forgets but the two senses working in conjunction can recreate a mood long forgotten. The musical accompaniments arranged by the Film Library are carried out in the spirit of the old-time piano player who often improvised with one eye on the screen. This music, however, is in no sense a caricature but seriously reproduces the style and actual materials of our motion picture past."