

The Museum of Modern Art

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Arthur Kleiner, who has been composing, arranging and playing the piano accompaniments for silent films at The Museum of Modern Art for 28 years, is retiring the first of April, René d'Harnoncourt, Director of the Museum, announced today. As Music Director of the Department of Film since 1939, and probably the world's only full-time silent movie pianist, Mr. Kleiner has sought out long-lost scores for innumerable early films, researched films for which the scores could not be found in order to compose the appropriate music, and written scores when none existed.

Born in Vienna, Austria, Mr. Kleiner studied piano, organ and theory at the Vienna Music Academy from 1914 to 1921. From then until 1928 he was an accompanist-composer for major dance companies touring throughout Europe and a professor at Max Reinhardt's Seminar for Actors in Vienna, where he also composed scores for numerous plays. He conducted A Midsummer Night's Dream for Reinhardt during the Salzburg Festival of 1933. After arriving in the United States in 1938, his first job was playing piano accompaniment for choreographer George Balanchine, as well as for Agnes de Mille and the Ballet Theatre.

In 1939 when he was approached by Iris Barry, first Curator of the Museum's Department of Film, to play for the Museum's screenings, she asked him if he could play ragtime. He recalls, "I said 'yes,' even though the only ragtime I knew, as the music meant nothing to me, was the rag by Stravinsky." He took the three-month job (which did not entail playing ragtime) and stayed 28 years.

The first film score he composed was for Potemkin, for which the original was lost or destroyed during the Nazi era. He has completed a short film documentary on Pavlova and is working on a similar film on Nijinsky.

Mr. Kleiner explains, "When I can't find the original score for a film, I try to find out the type of music that was played at the time: popular songs as located in titles or scenes. If I cannot find the score, I try to find music in the style of the time....Everything must be historically correct. It's just a question of research. I write out the music or just use cues. I sometimes am lucky enough to find the
(over)

original score, such as in Griffith's Birth of A Nation and Intolerance....My most difficult scoring job of all time was scoring Pudovkin's Storm Over Asia....Although Griffith's Home Sweet Home is only 50 minutes long, Griffith had some little old man play 'Home Sweet Home' on a violin 20 times during that 50 minutes. Do you know what it's like to write 20 variations on 'Home Sweet Home'?"

In 1945 Mr. Kleiner was awarded a prize for his musical composition for Anna Lucasta, the stage play commissioned by William Morris. He arranged and conducted the music for John van Druten's play I am a Camera (1952-53). In 1953 he was the solo pianist for Jean-Louis Barrault's French Repertory Theatre at the Ziegfeld Theatre, and the following year toured with Agnes de Mille's Dance Theatre. He has composed and recorded for many films since 1938 and has been the solo pianist for several television productions, including the National Broadcasting Company's Odyssey and Wide Wide World and Columbia Broadcasting System's Camera III. In 1960 he recorded "Musical Moods from Silent Films," which is available in the Museum Bookstore, and is about to cut two more long-playing records.

Mr. Kleiner met his wife Lorraine in 1953 while they were both working at the Museum. They have two sons, Jeffrey (12 years old) and Erik (9). They will live near Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Additional information available from Elizabeth Shaw, Director, and Linda Gordon, Assistant, Department of Public Information, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York, New York, 10019. Circle 5-8900.