

# The Museum of Modern Art

50th Anniversary



## MARY PICKFORD FESTIVAL - EIGHT RARE FILMS TO MARK MUSEUM'S HALF CENTURY

### SPECIAL PRESS SCREENINGS

Monday, June 4 from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

10:00	"Sparrows"	2:00	"My Best Girl"
11:30	"Little Lord Fauntleroy"	3:30	"The Taming of the Shrew"

Thursday, June 7 from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m.

1:00	"The Poor Little Rich Girl"	3:00	"Suds"
------	-----------------------------	------	--------

Fourth Floor Screening Room -- Enter through 21 West 53 Street

The longest-reigning queen of the movies, Mary Pickford, whose films remain in her personal collection and have not been seen by the public for forty years, will now make six of her most important works available to The Museum of Modern Art to celebrate the advent of its 50th year, in combination with two Pickford classics from the Museum's Film Archives.

MARY PICKFORD, opening June 14, will begin with "My Best Girl." Buddy Rogers, husband of the actress and her co-star in that film, will make a personal appearance at the 6:00 p.m. showing. He will discuss the incredible Pickford career, which remains unknown to recent generations though it continued for a quarter of a century, having begun before the first World War, a career that exemplifies Americana and the impact of the movies.

\*\*\*\*\*

We are now arranging a schedule of interviews for Buddy Rogers, who will be in New York the second week of June and will make a personal appearance at the Museum. In view of the distribution plans (worldwide) for these rare films, unavailable until now, this may be a propitious time to talk with the 74-year-old former bandleader and star on the subject of Miss Pickford and her appeal today, as well as on the film scene then and now. Please contact Kent Wittrup at (212) 956-7501.

This appearance by Mr. Rogers will be preceded on the same day, June 14, at 2:30 p.m. by an unusual documentary film on the life of Miss Pickford. Entitled "America's Sweetheart," it features commentary by Henry Fonda with added narration by Miss Pickford, Mr. Rogers, Gene Kelly, and others. This documentary attempts to explain the phenomenon that was Mary Pickford who, apart from her talent as an actress of far wider range than is generally recognized, also served as an ambassador of good will for the United States all over the world.

The Pickford program, arranged by Adrienne Mancina, Curator in the Museum's Department of Film, with the cooperation of Matty Kemp, Managing Director of the Mary Pickford Company, includes five films with which Gaylord Carter will perform his original scores on the "mighty Wurlitzer" organ: "My Best Girl" (1927), "Suds" (1920), "Little Lord Fauntleroy" (1921), "Little Annie Rooney" (1925), and "Sparrows" (1926). "The Poor Little Rich Girl" (1917) and "Amarilly of Clothesline Alley" (1918) will be accompanied on the piano by William Perry. "The Taming of the Shrew" (1929), one of Miss Pickford's later films and the only one she made with Douglas Fairbanks, has been recently revised to improve the quality of its sound and pictorial effect, so as to enhance this liberal interpretation of Shakespeare in "his first talkie."

Ms. Mancina notes that it is particularly appropriate that the Museum present these films in conjunction with its 50th Anniversary. Miss Pickford was one of the first supporters of the Museum's pioneering Film Library. In 1935 she gave a dinner party at Pickfair to introduce its founding Curator, Iris Barry, to many Hollywood notables--such influential citizens as Harold Lloyd, Mack Sennett, Sam Goldwyn, William S. Hart, and others who eventually became donors to the collection. Moreover, as recently as last year, Miss

Pickford gave yet another reception at Pickfair in honor of the Museum's ongoing preservation program and its efforts to bring recognition to film as an art form--for which the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences this year awarded a special honorary Oscar to the Department of Film.

Miss Pickford, born Gladys Smith in Canada in the year 1893, helped to support her family from the age of five as a child actress. She acted on the stage until she began making movies--143 one-reelers in the years 1909 to 1912. She was an anonymous performer on the screen in these years, as actors were not credited by name in films of that time. Eventually, however, her blond curls became as much a symbol of American innocence and insouciance as Chaplin's derby and cane.

In her more mature years, she herself became a producer, a founder of United Artists, and her filmography embraces 52 feature films, dating from 1913 to 1933. Some of the best of these films are on view in the present exhibition, and though Pickford admirers and historians may dispute their relative merits, there are special qualities in all of them.

For example, in "The Poor Little Rich Girl" of 1917, Miss Pickford for the first time, at age twenty-four, played a ten-year-old child; and thereafter her followers urged her to remain, as Gary Carey has noted, a perpetual Peter Pan. In this film--recreating the myth of the child whose smile brightens everyone else's life--oversized sets were used to portray the child's world. In the actress's every gesture, expression, and posture, the audience experiences "the contradictory moods that lend wings to the transitory nature of the child." The picture was directed by Maurice Tourneur, the French director, and its dream sequence has been singled out for its delicacy in fusing the real and imaginary worlds of the young heroine.

In 1918 Miss Pickford made "Amarilly of Clothesline Alley." Directed by Marshall Neilan, it points up class distinctions, a favorite subject of the time, later evident in Charles Chaplin's "City Lights." There is a certain disdain here for the rich do-gooders, and Amarilly, representing "the clothesline people," refuses to be transformed like Pygmalion and instead opts for an impoverished suitor rather than a well-to-do one. The film thus thrusts aside the conventional Cinderella ending. If the picture's sympathies are with the poor, it is not surprising considering the populist character of its audience.

"Suds" is another well-known Pickford comedy, which takes place in a French Hand Laundry in London. Originally it was performed on the stage by Maude Adams in the play "'Op 'o Me Thumb," and here again Miss Pickford, impersonates a poor, independent laundress who dreams of the luxurious life of her customers. "Why have people who cherish Chaplin, Keaton and Sennett overlooked 'Suds'?" asks film scholar Edward Wagenknecht, attributing such neglect to "pure ignorance." Another film chronicler, Gordon Gow, declares that there is "a grit to the demeanor" of Miss Pickford, who displays "a boundless resilience."

"Little Lord Fauntleroy," based on Frances Hodgkins Burnett's beloved classic, became a worldwide success. Following a popular trend, Pickford performed a dual role. She portrays both Cedric, the "sissy" with curls, who covers up his really boisterous nature, and his tall, gracious mother, called "Dearest." When one Mary kisses the other, the scene, which took sixteen hours to film, involves trick photography so seamless that it left its audience awestruck. The credit for such work goes to Charles Rosher, who shot all Pickford film from 1918 to 1928. He perfected the double exposure process and came up with the idea of Mary as Dearest wearing ten

inch heels in her scene with Fauntleroy. So that Miss Pickford could rest between scenes, Rosher originated the role of the stand-in, the first one being a mannequin head, dressed with a wig of golden curls.

With "Little Annie Rooney," its title based on a popular song of the '90s, and in "Sparrows," both directed by William Beaudine, Mary Pickford is the unbeatable, sagacious hoyden: in the former, as the orphan of a police officer killed on duty; and in the latter, as the leader of a group of orphaned or homeless children who escape across a murky Southern swamp infested with alligators (which scene provides an excellent example of 1920s art direction). The title of "Sparrows" was inspired by the biblical reference to the Lord's protection of the humble sparrow.

Finally, in 1927, Miss Pickford emerged as a plucky shopgirl resourceful enough to win over Charles "Buddy" Rogers in "My Best Girl." "The last of her silent films, 'My Best Girl' was in some ways her most enjoyable," Arthur Lennig observes in a program note. "Essentially a comedy, it is one of the few films in which Mary plays a normal, datable girl and not a waif of one kind or another." This was the image Miss Pickford had wanted for so long and finally achieved.

In "The Taming of the Shrew," however, "'the old Pickford tricks' are far from inappropriate," notes Richard Griffith, late Curator in the Department of Film, commenting on the film visualization of the manner in which Petruchio (Douglas Fairbanks) humiliates and tames his wife. "The production as a whole is both shrewd and handsome. The cuts and expansion would surely have been approved by Shakespeare or any other working dramatist who knew his public, while the beautiful Menzies-Irving sets, slightly yellowed in the original prints by sepia toning, create a Padua that belongs neither to Hollywood nor to the Elizabethan stage but to the Italy of Shakespeare's fancy."



## MARY PICKFORD

June 14 - June 24, 1979

America's Sweetheart: The Mary Pickford Story (1978)	Thursday, June 14 at 2:30 Friday, June 15 at 2:30
My Best Girl (1927)	Thursday, June 14 at 6:00 Sunday, June 24 at 5:00
Suds (1920)	Thursday, June 14 at 8:30 Sunday, June 17 at 2:30
Little Annie Rooney (1925)	Saturday, June 16 at 2:30 Thursday, June 21 at 6:00
Sparrows (1926)	Saturday, June 16 at 5:00 Thursday, June 21 at 2:30
The Taming of the Shrew (1929)	Sunday, June 17 at 5:00 Friday, June 22 at 2:30
The Poor Little Rich Girl (1917)	Monday, June 18 at 2:30 Saturday, June 23 at 5:00
Little Lord Fauntleroy (1921)	Thursday, June 21 at 8:30 Saturday, June 23 at 2:30
Amarilly of Clothesline Alley (1918)	Sunday, June 24 at 2:30

The Department of Film would like to acknowledge its gratitude to Matty Kemp and the Mary Pickford Company for making this presentation possible.

June 1979

For further information, please contact Lillian Gerard, Special Projects Coordinator (212) 956-7296 or Kent Wittrup (212) 956-7501, Department of Public Information, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York, New York 10019.