

50th Anniversary



NO. 40
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART FILM PROGRAM
TO SHOW FOUR RARE FILMS DIRECTED
BY DOUGLAS SIRK IN NAZI GERMANY

Four rare films directed by Douglas Sirk during his career in Germany in the mid-1930s will be shown by The Museum of Modern Art Department of Film, August 15-18, 1980. All films will have English subtitles. Introduced by film historian Richard Traubner, the films are: TO NEW SHORES (1937, Zu neuen Ufern) and LA HABANERA (1937), both starring Zarah Leander; FINAL CHORD (1936, Schlussakkord), with Willy Birgel and Lil Dagover; and PILLARS OF SOCIETY (1935, Stützen der Gesellschaft), with Heinrich George. Schedule as follows:

TO NEW SHORES, Friday, August 15 at 6:00 (Introduced by Mr. Traubner)
Sunday, August 17 at 8:30

LA HABANERA, Friday, August 15 at 8:30
Sunday, August 17 at 6:00

FINAL CHORD, Saturday, August 16 at 6:00
Monday, August 18 at 8:30

PILLARS OF SOCIETY, Saturday, August 16 at 8:30
Monday, August 18 at 6:00

Numerous Douglas Sirk films produced in Hollywood have been shown at MoMA but his career in Germany in the 30's is largely unknown. Sirk (then Detlef Sierck) had been a successful and versatile theater director before his move to the cinema (Ufa) in 1934. He carried over into film his strong sense of drama and skill with actors.

Zarah Leander, the most famous of the Sirk stars, was the Nazi cinema's answer to Greta Garbo and Marlene Dietrich, a beautiful Swede with a deep

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contralto voice. The songs in her films also made her famous, the most popular being the sultry theme from LA HABANERA, "The Wind Told Me a Song." Other great stars of the German stage and screen, like Heinrich George and Lil Dagover, appeared in Sirk's early films.

Already specializing in the glossy soap operas and melodramas he would later make in Hollywood, Sirk perfected his talents at Berlin's famous Ufa studios before escaping the Nazis in 1937 while supposedly scouting for foreign locations. His German films were highly considered in their time, showing a rare richness and sensitivity for films made during the Third Reich. As Mr. Traubner notes, "To say that Sirk's German films were distinctly Nazi would be a distortion of the truth." They were made not as pure propaganda, like TRIUMPH OF THE WILL, but as entertainments, or literary adaptations. "Neither can one call them unrelated to the film policies of the Third Reich. Films had to be approved by the rigid censorship and classification boards, and even in their most escapist and innocuously melodramatic moments they were part of the calculated Nazi policy of the entertainment film. These were made as a distraction from the rigors of daily life and as an indication to the German public (as well as foreigners) that the German film industry was still able to churn out the glossy, well-made entertainments for which it was so celebrated in the Weimar era."

Richard Traubner, who introduced the successful European Operetta Film season at Goethe House New York last year, has written for The New York Times, Film Comment, and other publications.

The Department of Film would like to acknowledge its gratitude to the National Film Archives of the British Film Institute for making the Douglas Sirk films available.

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