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MAX OPHULS

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A BRITISH FILM INSTITUTE INDEX

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The photograph of Max Ophuls and Martine Carole on the cover was taken during the filming of *Lola Montès*. Stills on the inside cover: above, *Sans Lendemain*; below, Charles Boyer, Danielle Darrieux and Vittorio de Sica in *Madame de . . .*. The stills from *Sans Lendemain* and *Liebelei* are from the National Film Archive. Stills from *La Ronde*, *Letter from an Unknown Woman*, *Lola Montès* and *Madame de . . .* by courtesy of Curzon Films, Eros Films, Regent Film Distributors and Franco-London Film respectively.

FILM CREDIT ABBREVIATIONS

Dir.—Director. *prod.*—Producer. *exec. prod.*—Executive Producer. *assoc. prod.*—Associate Producer.
asst.—Assistant. *sc.*—Script. *dial.*—Dialogue. *photo.*—Director of Photography. *camera op.*—Camera Operator.
col.—Colour Process. *tech. dir.*—Technical Director.
edit.—Editor. *mus.*—Music. *sd.*—Sound. *sd. rec.*—Sound Recordist. *dist.*—Distributors. *cert.*—Certificate.

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INTRODUCTION

IN England and America Max Ophuls occupies a very special place, that of the beloved minor master. In France, although he had made six or seven films there between 1934 and 1940, Ophuls was almost unknown until 1950. If he was mentioned in French histories of the cinema, it was as the "Austrian" director of *Liebelei*—and sometimes not even as that. Bardèche and Brasillach, for instance, pretend that he was not the real director of that film. But with *La Ronde*, and more especially *Madame de . . .*, his stock began to go up. His reputation reached its zenith with *Lola Montès*; and Ophuls is now considered by many French critics to be one of the cinema's greatest directors.

What has brought about this change in their evaluation of Max Ophuls? The quality of his last four films has a good deal to do with it, of course, but there are other reasons too. There are at present two overlapping groups of critics with a particular interest in Ophuls. The first group might be called the 'Neo-Christians'. Their leader is Henri Agel and their organ the magazine *Télé-Ciné* (although many of the contributors to *Cahiers du Cinéma* and *Cinéma 58* also belong to this group.) The starting-point was *Télé-Ciné's* *fiche* for *La Ronde*. The film, we were told, was only superficially a frivolous picture of immorality; beneath, it was a demonstration of the vanity of the flesh and the absurdity of life without faith. It was *Lola Montès*, however, that really offered these Grail-seekers scope: Lola is a "saint" (François Truffaut). She is "a daughter of Eve, inheritor of Original Sin, still dizzy from the Fall"; the ring-master is 'messianic'; and "Ophuls brings us to the very foot of the Cross" (Dominique Delouche). "If he paints Hell [in *Lola*] it is to bring us a glimpse of God" (Claude Beylie).

The second group is more catholic and less Catholic. There has been a strong movement in France during recent years against the classic theory that editing (*montage*) was the fundamental element in the cinema. Many writers in France (and elsewhere) now hold that camera movement within a sequence is much more important than the movement from shot to shot. This idea has been especially developed by Henri Agel, Alexandre Astruc, André Bazin, and others. And, of course, if there is one thing particularly characteristic of Ophuls it is his preference for camera movement over *montage*.

Another characteristic of some French critics and directors

today is their disdain for the traditional story-telling film. They are much more interested in presenting a state of mind, an idea, a climate of feeling, than in straightforward narrative. Of course stories are still used, but as a pretext—something to hang the film on to. And again, although Ophuls' films tell stories, in many cases—particularly in *Lola Montès*, but also in such works as *Signora di Tutti*—the story is not the main element in the film.

Then again, most French critics of the younger generation had not seen any of Ophuls' pre-1950 films until the recent retrospective programmes at the Cinémathèque Française. Therefore, they saw all his earlier productions with *Lola Montès* in mind. Just as each incident of Lola's life was given meaning in the film by our knowledge of the end of her life, so each film of Ophuls was judged according to whether or not it was a prefiguration of one or other of the elements in *Lola Montès*. But hindsight can lead to a falsification of judgment; and the fact that Ophuls died after making *Lola Montès* contributed further to the confusion: to these critics, *Lola* appears as the culmination of his life's work—his 'Sistine Chapel', according to Claude Beylie. *Signora di Tutti* is a fine film, but not because Gaby Doriot is a prefiguration of Lola Montès; and *Werther* is still a bad film whether or not it is an "astonishing sketch" for *Madame de . . .*

Finally, the admirers of Ophuls are partly influenced by the current anti-classical, pro-baroque and rococo mood in France. To be sure, after Versailles, Salzburg makes a pleasant change. And, compared with the 'classical' technique of René Clair in *Porte des Lilas*, *Lola Montès* does seem like a breath of fresh air. Moreover, France is really only now discovering certain aspects of German-Austrian culture to which England and America were introduced through the many refugees of the 'thirties. For example, a work like *Ariadne auf Naxos* is still known only to the happy few in France; and Bavarian and Austrian rococo architecture, the plays of Schnitzler, and so on, have all the charm of novelty.

* * *

All these reasons, however, are hardly likely to influence the Anglo-Saxon filmgoer. They are either remote from our preoccupations, or they are irrelevant. For us, Ophuls remains a little master, but a very remarkable one.

Perhaps the most astonishing thing about Ophuls' work is its sense of continuity. He made 21 full-length films in five countries over a period of 25 years, and yet they are all of a piece. First, it must be remembered that this sense of

continuity stems partly from the fact that he generally worked with the same people. Most of his films were photographed by Eugène Schufftan, Franz Planer or Christian Matras. His production director (Ralph Baum), his set designer (Jean d'Eaubonne), his script writer (Jacques Natanson) followed him from film to film, and sometimes from country to country. Yet, unlike William Wyler, whose dependence on the camerawork of Gregg Toland was so cruelly revealed after Toland's death, Max Ophuls is ultimately the only one responsible for his films. He has a style; the fact that he often worked with the same team only brought this out the more.

The most obvious characteristic of Ophuls' style is its incredible fluidity. The trade-mark of an Ophuls film is, of course, the tracking shot. As James Mason explained in his little poem:

*I think I know the reason why
Producers tend to make him cry.
Inevitably they demand
Some stationary set-ups, and
A shot that does not call for tracks
Is agony for poor dear Max,
Who, separated from his dolly,
Is wrapped in deepest melancholy.
Once, when they took away his crane,
I thought he'd never smile again. . . .*

Ophuls relied more than most directors on tracking shots, crane shots, pan shots. He made relatively little use of the close-up, or static compositions, or the classic *montage* procedure. His technique had its disadvantages. Tracking-for-tracking's sake could lead to such ridiculous scenes as the opening of the *Maison Tellier* episode in *Le Plaisir* (see page 36). Also, excessive movement can defeat its own purpose: instead of engendering a feeling of excitement, it can become simply boring. On the other hand, Ophuls' fluid style can be terribly intoxicating, as in the circus scene of *Lola Montès*, the café scene in *Liebelei*, or the ball episode in *Signora di Tutti*.

The musical element in his films is not less important, if harder to define. Firstly, the musical score plays a major part in his films. In *Signora di Tutti*, the motif of the waltz at Gaby's first ball plays an important dramatic rôle in the film. The same is true of the songs in *Lola Montès* and *La Ronde*. But Ophuls also used words, phrases, images musically—the

recurring leit-motif of "Vergogna" in *Signora di Tutti*; "Ça va aller" in *Lola Montès*; "40 francs par jour" in *Divine*. These phrases are used almost operatically: they identify characters, they denote themes, they mark transitions.

Ophuls' narrative technique must also be briefly mentioned. In relatively few of his films does he tell his story straightforwardly. In *Tendre Ennemie*, *Signora di Tutti* and *Lola Montès*, particularly, he invented a method of narration whose ingenuity perfectly suits the story he has to tell.

Finally, there is Ophuls' passion for decor: cages, mirrors, staircases (there are sixty shots of staircases in *Madame de . . .*), laces, gauzes, hangings, chandeliers. This heavily-charged decorative style is not to everyone's taste, and there are films in which one gets the impression that everything is being seen through yards of *tulle*. But it is a style, and a style in most cases in keeping with his subject.

What are Ophuls' subjects? The simplest answer is: women. More specifically: women in love. Most often, women who are unhappily in love, or to whom love brings misfortune of one kind or another. The surroundings in which they live are usually luxurious; in any event, they generally manage at least one performance at the opera and one ball during the course of the film. They usually live between 1880-1900: "J'aime le passé. C'est tellement plus reposant que le présent —et plus sûr que l'avenir." (Anton Walbrook in *La Ronde*.) The setting is usually "Vienna"; sometimes it is actually Vienna. Either way, though, it is not the real *fin-de-siècle* Vienna but rather an ideal Vienna—the city of operetta and Strauss waltzes.

In his choice of subject-matter, Ophuls often came close to trashiness and occasionally overstepped the boundary. But for most of the time he managed to keep his balance. His subjects in themselves may be of little interest to many people, and it is not for a creative interpretation of reality as most people know it that we go to Max Ophuls. His good films, or many of them, are examples of the triumph of form over content. "He is a director who rarely moves out of a minor key, and who, within self-imposed limitations, has achieved a real personal style; his films may be unimportant, but they are never trivial." (Penelope Houston.)



Max Ophuls talking to Anne Baxter on the set of "Madame de . . ."

Dann schon lieber Lebertran

1930. GERMANY. *production:* UFA. *dir:* Max Ophuls. *scenario:* Erich Kästner; based on his own story of the same name. *adapt. and sc:* Emeric Pressburger and Max Ophuls. *photo:* Eugène Schufftan.

CAST: Käte Haak, Heinz Günsdorf, Paul Kemp, Hanelore Schroth. *Original length:* 40 mins. approx.

AFTER EMPLOYING MAX OPHULS as dialogue director for Anatole Litvak, the executives of UFA suggested that he might try directing a 40-minute featurette. Ophuls chose a story by Erich Kästner, the title of which could be translated as "I'd rather take cod-liver oil." This refers to a popular German saying: to express the idea that something was really intolerable, one said "I'd rather take cod-liver oil than" In Kästner's story, however, it is literally a question of cod-liver oil. It is the story of some children, one of whom, after taking his cod-liver oil one night, prays that the children be permitted to change rôles with their parents. His prayer goes up to heaven; God is away but Saint Peter decides that he too might for once grant a prayer. The next morning the little boy wakes up with a cigar in his mouth; he gets dressed, and sends his parents off to school. They have an awful time of it there, having forgotten all they knew. The children, on the other hand, go off to the office, where they are besieged by the tax collector, threatened with strikes, and so on. That night they decide that they have had enough and that they would rather take cod-liver oil after all.

In short, this is a similar story to F. Anstey's *Vice Versa*, which was itself filmed some years ago by Peter Ustinov. For three months UFA were afraid to release the film. Finally, they gave it a trial run at a suburban cinema, where its success was such that after two days it was transferred to the biggest UFA theatre in the west end of Berlin.

Die Lachende Erben

1931. GERMANY. *production:* UFA. *dir:* Max Ophuls. *sc:* Felix Joachimson. *story:* Trude Herka. *photo:* Eduard Hoesch. *mus:* Clemens Schmalstich, Hans-Otto Borgmann.

CAST: Lien Deyers, Lizzi Waldmüller, Heinz Rühmann, Max Adalbert, Julius Falkenstein, Ida Wüst, Walter Janssen, Friedrich Ettl.

Original length: 6,780 ft. 75 mins. approx.

Dist. in Germany: UFA. *first showing in Berlin:* March 6, 1933.

THE TITLE OF this film could be translated as *The Happy Heirs*. Again, there is a reference to a German saying: why work hard and save all your life when your money will only go to your happy heirs? The film was apparently a musical version of *Romeo and Juliet*, set in the Rhineland. It is impossible, however, to locate a copy or to obtain any further information about it.

Die verliebte Firma

1931. GERMANY. *production:* DLS. *dir:* Max Ophuls. *sc:* Dr. Fritz Zeckendorf; after an idea by Ernst Marischka and Bruno Granichstaedten. *photo:* Karl Puth. *mus:* Bruno Granichstaedten, Grete Walter, Ernst Hauke.

CAST: Anny Ahlers, Gustave Fröhlich, Lien Deyers, Ernst Verebes, José Wedorn, Hubert v. Meyerinck, Fritz Steiner, Leonard Setchel, Hermann Krehan, Werner Finck.

Original length: 6,520 ft. 72 mins. approx.

Dist. in Germany: DLS. *first showing in Berlin:* February 23, 1932.

ANOTHER OF OPHULS' early films about which very little is known is *Die verliebte Firma* (the title means *The Company is in Love*). In an interview with Jacques Rivette and François Truffaut (*Cahiers du Cinéma*, No. 72, June, 1957) Max Ophuls said that the story of the picture was rather insignificant, but that it was the first film where he was able to impose a sense of rhythm from the beginning to the end. The story concerns a troupe of movie people who are trying to make a film on location. All the members of the company fall in love with the girl in the local telegraph office; and they even decide that she might replace their own untalented star. They take her back to the studio, where they discover that she has no talent either. Because the girl is so beautiful they all lie to her, but finally decide that they cannot use her. The film ends happily, however: she gets married instead of becoming a star.

Die verkaufte Braut

1932. GERMANY. *production:* Reichsliga-Film GmbH, Munich. *dir:* Max Ophuls. *sc:* Curt Alexander. After the opera by Friedrich Smetana. *photo:* Reimar Kuntze, Franz Koch, Herbert Illig, Otto Wirsching. *mus:* Friedrich Smetana and Theo Mackeben.

CAST: Willy Domgraf-Fassbender (*Hans*), Karl Valentin (*Director of the Circus*), Liesl Karlstadt (*His Wife*), Annemarie Sörensen

(*Esmeralda, their adopted daughter*), Max Nadler (*The Mayor*), Jarmila Novotna (*Marie, his daughter*), Otto Wennicke (*Kezal, the match-maker*), Paul Kemp (*Wenzel*): and Max Schreck, Hans Appel, Ernest Ziegler, Herman Kner, Maria Janowska, Karl Riedel, Georg Holl, Richard Révy.

Original length: 6,880 ft. approx. 76 mins.

Dist. in Germany: Heros-Film Verleih GmbH. The film was first shown in Munich on August 18, 1932 and in Berlin on September 2, 1932. *English title:* The Bartered Bride.

CONTRARY TO GENERAL reports, this film was not made in Czechoslovakia. Instead, Ophuls caused quite a stir by building a whole Czech village among the hills of Geiselsgasteig (near Munich) and by engaging real fair-ground people and local inhabitants to act in the film. The picture follows quite closely the story of Smetana's opera *The Bartered Bride*: Marie's efforts, in the face of parental opposition, to marry Hans, the man she loves. On the evidence of the first two reels in the possession of the Cinémathèque Française, this seems a fine film, and certainly a most successful bit of filmed opera. As Charles Bitsch wrote in *Cahiers du Cinéma*, "the opening scene is an unbridled farandole with the camera going faster than the sound." These first two reels, however, consist largely of the overture to the opera, which is accompanied by pantomime. According to Trude Weiss (*Close Up*, Vol. IX, No. 4) the film when seen as a whole is less successful:

"Can one imagine anything worse than to hear one's favourite song in the following way: some bars of the melody, and at the same time, someone speaking the words, which—shoddily composed in the tradition of opera texts—are simply futile without their tune. There is really not much left of the opera except the story and parts of the music." She admits, however, that "the man who made the film is extremely talented . . . he was lucky in his choice of actors (the two principals, Jarmila Novotna and Willy Domgraf-Fassbender, are fascinating both in appearance and voice). The film introduces a lot of charming outdoor scenes. The most brilliant scene perhaps is the duet between Kezal and Hans, which they sing riding horseback on a lovely long road between thick woods—the rhythm of the melody fitting so well to the galloping that you nearly jump with them in your chair. On the whole, the aim of the film seems to be to drag the lavish rhythms from their frame and dissolve the opera into a whirl of rapture and movement." Which is just what might have been expected from Max Ophuls.

Liebelei

1932. GERMANY. *production:* Elite Tonfilm Prod., GmbH. *prod.:* Fred Lissa. *dir.:* Max Ophuls. *sc.:* Hans Wilhelm, Curt Alexander. From the play *Liebelei* by Arthur Schnitzler. *photo:* Franz Planer. *edit:* Friedel Buchott. *sets:* G. Pellon. *mus.:* Theo Mackeben.

CAST: Wolfgang Liebeneiner (*Fritz Lobheimer*), Magda Schneider (*Christine Weiring*), Luise Ullrich (*Mizi Schlager*), Willy Eichberger (*Theo Kaiser*), Paul Hoerbiger (*Hans Weiring, Christine's father*), Gustaf Gruendgens (*Baron Eggerdorff*), Olga Tschechowa (*Baroness Eggerdorff*); and Lotte Spira, Walter Steinbeck.

Original length: 7,920 ft. 88 mins.

B.B.F.C. cert.: A. *dist. in Germany:* Metropol-Filmverein GmbH (*Berlin*): Rheinische Film GmbH (*Cologne*): Fritz Stein-Filmverein GmbH (*Leipzig*). *dist. in U.K.:* The Film Society. The film was first shown in Leipzig on March 3, 1933 and in Berlin on March 16, 1933. *first showing in London:* January 19, 1934, at the Academy Cinema.

WHILE HE WAS still engaged in shooting the last scenes of *Die verkaufte Braut*, it was suggested to Ophuls that he make a film of Schnitzler's play *Liebelei*. He had always been fond of the play; on re-reading it, he found it a bit dusty but still liked it as much. Unfortunately, the producer wanted the film to cash in on the success of *Congress Dances*, and therefore insisted on a happy ending. Ophuls refused; but that afternoon, as he recounts in the *Cahiers du Cinéma* interview, a distribution company proposed that he by-pass the producer and make the film directly for them. He agreed, and the film was shot in four weeks. It is interesting to note that Ophuls told Francis Koval (in an interview, *Sight and Sound*, July 1950) that Magda Schneider, a gay and popular musical comedy star, had first been cast for Mizi and Luise Ullrich for Christine. But Luise Ullrich proved to be naturally light-hearted by temperament, and, following a sudden inspiration, Max Ophuls made them exchange parts—with startlingly successful results.

The film tells the story of Christine, daughter of a musician, and Fritz, an army officer. They fall in love, but Fritz is killed in a duel with the husband of his ex-mistress. When Christine hears the news, she commits suicide.

In spite of Ophuls' professed liking for the play, his film is a very free adaptation. In Schnitzler's original, Fritz's affair with the Baroness is far from being over and his feelings for Christine are consequently less profound than in the film version. Actually, the title *Liebelei*—which has been translated in many ways, as *Light o' Love*, *Philandering*, *Flirtation*

—best describes the nature of his sentiments. The force of the play resides in the fact that although this affair is for Fritz only a *Liebelei*, it is for Christine a great love. In the last act, when she hears that Fritz has been killed in a duel over a woman, Christine cries out: “For this woman, this woman whom he loved;—and her husband—yes, yes, her husband killed him. . . . And I . . . what am I then? . . . what was I to him? I was nothing to him but a pastime—and he dies for another.” The crowning irony is that she is told Fritz is already buried, and that only his nearest relations and friends were asked to the funeral.

Ophuls has changed all this. The duel is now only an ironic twist of fate, Fritz’s affair with the Baroness being already over; and he really loves Christine as much as she loves him. This is a somewhat less interesting and more conventionally tearful story than the one Schnitzler told. On the other hand, some critics think differently. For Claude Beylie, for instance, it was Ophuls who gave the work its true dimensions, who led us “directly to the palpitating heart of the drama. German irony was exchanged for male gaiety, sadder and more profound.”

In any case, Schnitzler or not, the film has great charm. Notable are the performance of Mozart’s *Entführung aus dem Serail* which begins the film, the waltz in the café—the dancers revolving clockwise, the camera counter-clockwise—the unforgettable sleigh-ride through the snow-covered woods when Fritz and Christine swear eternal love, and especially the remarkable duel scene off. Theo and Mizi anxiously await the second shot, Fritz’s shot; not hearing it, Theo breaks away and runs into the woods where the duel is taking place. At that moment a section of the first movement of Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony begins; it continues as the image of Theo fades out and is succeeded by a few seconds’ blackout, then by a quick fade-in to the orchestra at rehearsal when Theo and Mizi come for Christine’s father. It continues still as they go out through the wings of the theatre, and stops only as they open the door of Fritz’s flat and find Christine standing there. The film ends with a beautiful sequence: from above, the camera sees the crowd around Christine’s body in the snow-covered street; then it pans around the empty flat as we hear Christine and Fritz’s voices swearing eternal love. Then we cut to a long tracking shot through the snow-covered pine forest. “A minor masterpiece if ever there was one” (William Whitebait, *New Statesman and Nation*).

Une Histoire d'Amour

1933. FRANCE. *dir.*: Max Ophuls. *dial.*: André Doderet.
CAST: Georges Rigaud (*Théo*), Simone Héliard (*Mizi*); and Abel Tarride, Georges Mauloy, Pierre Stéphen, André Dubosc. Magda Schneider, “Georges” (Wolfgang) Liebeneiner, Olga Tschechowa and the rest of the German cast were dubbed into French.

THIS IS A French version of *Liebelei*. Max Ophuls explained (in the *Cahiers du Cinéma* interview) that when he arrived in Paris after Hitler’s coming to power (reportedly, his name was taken off the credits of *Liebelei* because he was Jewish), he was so broke that he agreed to make a French version of the film. “All we re-did was the close-ups; the rest was the German version, dubbed into French. In all, it took about twelve days’ work.”

On a Volé un Homme

1933. FRANCE. *production*: Fox-Europa. *prod.*: Erich Pommer.
dir.: Max Ophuls. *sc. and dial.*: René Pujol and Hans Wilhelm.
photo.: René Guissart. *mus.*: B. Kasper, Jurman.
CAST: Henri Garat (*Jean de Lafaye, the financier*), Lili Damita (*Annette*), Fernand Fabre (*Robert*), Charles Fallot (*The Servant*), Nina Myrol (*The Lady*); and Pierre Labry, Raoul Marco, Lucien Callamand, Pierre Piérade.
Studios Paramount, Joinville. *first showing in Paris*: March, 1934.

CLAUDE BEYLIE *seems to be the only writer who remembers this vanished film. According to him, Ophuls made it at a rather difficult moment in his life when he did not know what his nationality would be the next day. “It is the story of Jean de Lafaye, a young financier, shady but seductive, who is sequestered in a villa at Antibes for mysterious reasons having to do with speculations on the Stock Exchange. Annette is supposed to be guarding him, but she falls in love instead. This infuriates Robert, her lover and Jean’s business rival. Finally, Annette herself is abducted, but Jean manages to escape in time to put things right.” Beylie adds that this rather stupid detective story is saved by its many baroque and decorative elements. Max Ophuls’ own comment on the film was: “A pot-boiler, not my cup of tea.”

* In *Max Ophuls*, by Claude Beylie. Published by the Club du Livre de Cinéma, Brussels, 1958.

La Signora di Tutti

1934. ITALY. *production:* Novella Films. *prod:* Rizzoli. *dir:* Max Ophuls. *sc:* Hans Wilhelm, Curt Alexander and Max Ophuls. Based on the novel *La Signora di Tutti* by Salvator Gotta. *photo:* Ubaldo Arata. *edit:* Ferdinando M. Poggioli. *sets:* Giuseppe Capponi. *costumes:* Sandro Radice. *mus:* Daniele Amfitheatrof. *songs:* Daniel Dax. *sd:* Giovanni Bittmann. *prod. director:* Ralph Baum.

CAST: Isa Miranda (*Gaby Doriot*), Memo Benassi (*Leonardo Nanni*), Tatiana Pavlova (*Alma, his wife*), Nelly Corradi (*Anna, Gaby's sister*); and Frederico Benfer, Franco Coop, Lamberto Picasso, Mario Ferrari, Mattia Sassanelli.

The film was made at the Cines Studios, Rome. At the second Venice Biennale it was awarded the "Coppa del Ministero delle Corporazione" as the technically best Italian film.

MAX OPHULS' NEXT film was made in Italy. He was asked to direct a picture by the newspaper owner Rizzoli*, who wanted to enter the film business himself and who had seen *Liebelei*. For his first film, he wanted to adapt one of his favourite novels, *La Signora di Tutti* by Salvator Gotta, a popular Italian novelist. To find the right girl for the lead, Rizzoli organised a contest. One of the applicants was Isa Miranda, who until then had had little success in the cinema and was just about to give up the films for a job as a solicitor's secretary. The story goes that when Ophuls saw her, he said: "This is the woman for my film." *Signora di Tutti* was a tremendous success for Isa Miranda, really launching her career; and it remains perhaps her best performance.

This story of the life of a film star, Gaby Doriot, was also one of Ophuls' best films. As the film begins, we hear and see a gramophone record playing the title song of Gaby Doriot's most recent picture *La Signora di Tutti* ("Everybody's Lady"). We cut to a printing press rolling out enormous posters with her photograph. There follows a long tracking shot through the studios, accompanied by some very effective music, and we find Gaby's body stretched out on her bathroom floor: she has tried to commit suicide. There is an anxious conference of the studio magnates; they decide to go on with the publicity for the film. We cut again to the printing presses, and then to an operating theatre. The camera moves down and into the place of Gaby's head. An ether cone descends

* Rizzoli's later career was most auspicious. His company became one of the leading Italian production organisations producing films by de Sica and Clair as well as Ophuls' own *Madame de . . .*

on to the camera, the image dissolves, and a title tells us that under the influence of the ether she re-lives her life as if in a dream.

Gaby is first seen at seventeen: her teacher, a married man, has committed suicide. The principal of the school assumes that it is her fault and hisses "Vergogna" (shame) at her. This "Vergogna" returns over and over again as one of the leit-motifs of the film.

The next episode is Gaby's first ball, to which she has been invited by Roberto Nanni. They waltz around the festooned ballroom (marvellous waltz tune by Amfitheatrof), faster and faster, out into the library, out into the garden, finishing with one of Ophuls' 360 degree panoramic shots.

Roberto leaves for Rome, but Alma, his invalid mother, takes a fancy to Gaby and asks her to stay with her. Soon Roberto's father, Leonardo, begins to fall in love with Gaby. Things come to a head in a tremendous scene: hysterical, ludicrous even, and yet beautiful. One night Alma calls to Gaby that the waltz they played at her first ball is on the wireless. Becoming upset when Gaby does not answer, Alma gets out of bed, into her wheelchair, and sets out to look for her. We cut back and forth, at first slowly, then faster and faster, between Alma wheeling out of her bedroom and down the halls and Gaby and Leonardo out in the garden. Faster and faster Alma wheels, and soon we see only her shadow on the wall. Faster and faster come the cross-cuts, louder and louder the music. Finally, Alma, with a loud scream, hurtles down the staircase. Gaby runs towards the house. Then, in one of Ophuls' longest and most effective tracking shots, we see Gaby enter the house, cross the living-room, stop for a moment by Alma dead at the foot of the stairs; half-smiling and hysterical, she stares at Alma, then she runs up the stairs, along the hall, round the corner and into Alma's bedroom, where she violently smashes the wireless to pieces on the floor. And at last the music stops.

Tormented by remorse, Gaby leaves Leonardo after a few months and sets off to Rome to find a job. Leonardo, ruined by extravagance, is imprisoned for embezzlement. There follows a heartbreaking scene when, out of jail, he goes to the cinema where the première of *La Signora di Tutti* is being held. He walks around the lobby looking at Gaby's photographs, tears streaming down his face. Then, dazed, he walks out into the street and is run over.

Roberto, who had shunned his father and Gaby when he found out about their affair, now returns. Gaby, liberated

from her passion for Leonardo, believes that she can take up with him again. But Roberto meanwhile has married Gaby's sister; and it is this which has driven Gaby to suicide.

We cut back to the hospital: the ether cone rises, the operation is over. The doctors huddle together; we hear a voice say "Stop" and we see a foot on a pedal: slowly the printing press grinds to a stop, leaving one last photograph dangling between the frames. Gaby Doriot is dead.

This film, which Claude Beylie in his study of Ophuls calls "the most musical of Ophuls' films", is also most interesting in that for the first time we see Ophuls' technique of telling a story in fragments. For there is not only one long flashback (Gaby under ether), but this is broken up into many smaller flashbacks, thus announcing the technique of *Tendre Ennemie* and *Lola Montès*. It is too much, however, to say as Beylie does, that the fact that we see Gaby's life under ether "de-melodramatises" the film. The film remains melodrama, but it is great melodrama. Just as some Jacobean plays are melodrama, but transcended by the verse, so Ophuls transcends melodrama here by the visual equivalent of verse.

Divine

1935. FRANCE. *production*: Eden Productions. *dir*: Max Ophuls. *scenario and dial*: Colette. *sc*: Jean-Georges Auriol, Max Ophuls and Colette. *photo*: Roger Hubert. *edit*: Léonides Moguy. *sets*: Jacques Gotko. *mus*: Albert Wolff. *text of songs*: Roger Féral, Jean-Georges Auriol. *sd*: Fred Behrens. *assistants*: Ralph Baum, Colette de Juvenel, Pierre de Hérain.

CAST: Simone Berriau (*Ludivine Jarisse*—"Divine"), Georges Rigaud (*Antonin, the milkman*), Gina Manès (*Dora*), Philippe Hérial (*Lutuf-Allah, the fakir*), Sylvette Fillacier (*Gitanette*), Catherine Fonteney (*Mme. Jarisse*), Thérèse Dorny (*La Vénéneuse*), Yvette Lebon (*Roberte*), Jeanne Fusier-Gir (*Mme. Nicou, the concierge*), Jeanne Veniat (*Mme. Martelli*), Nane Germon (*Zaza*), Marcel Vallée (*Director*), Paul Azais (*Victor*), Roger Gaillard (*Pierre Paul*), Gabriello (*Nero, the animal tamer*), Juvenet (*Stage door keeper*), Floy Dupont (*Ferguson*).

Original length: 7,200 ft. approx. 80 mins.

The film was made at the Billancourt Studios and was first shown in France in November, 1935.

OPHULS DESCRIBED DIVINE as "my biggest flop." Colette wrote an original scenario for the film, in which she drew on her already published work on the music-hall (e.g., the chapter "L'Enfant de Bastienne" in *L'Envers du Music-Hall*).

It is the story of Ludivine Jarisse, a country girl who is persuaded by a friend to go to Paris, where she will be able to make 40 francs a day as a chorus girl. There she becomes involved with a dope-peddling snake charmer, his equivocal girl friend, a charge of arson, etc. Meanwhile, a handsome milkman has been courting her. Finally, tired of the sordid life she has been leading, and after a visit to a duck farm which reawakens her love for the country, she gives up her career, marries the milkman, and retires with him to the country.

François Truffaut (*Cahiers du Cinéma*) finds the film "a little masterpiece of verve, health and life, a real little Renoir, with naturally that Ophulsian frenzy which drives the camera up staircases, into the flies, in and out of the wings." Claude Beylie particularly likes the character of the snake charmer, an "obvious incarnation of Satan", and the "mixture of despair and meaningless pleasures."

Unfortunately, it is Ophuls who is right. First of all Simone Berriau is entirely miscast as the little girl from the country. Secondly, although Ophuls renders marvellously the music-hall atmosphere, his attempt to show Divine's disgust for it all is less successful. And the trip to the duck farm is simply ludicrous. As a result the film is unbalanced, and the whole last quarter a failure. Also it is now, at any rate, rather difficult to take seriously the scenes with the snake charmer and his perverse girl friend. In Colette's writing, there is always an atmosphere of health in the most sordid scenes; and it is this which Max Ophuls failed to capture.

There are, though, some marvellous camera movements—the 360 degree pan shot as Divine first arrives at the theatre, and an exciting montage scene of rehearsals for a new show.

Komedie om Geld

1936. HOLLAND. *production*: Cinetone Productie Maatschappij. *dir*: Max Ophuls. *scenario*: Max Ophuls, Walter Schlee, Alex de Haas. *dial*: Alex de Haas. *photo*: Eugène Schufftan. *edit*: Noel van Ess, Gerald Bensdorp. *sets*: Heinz Fenschel. *mus. and mus. dir*: Max Tak. *mus. arrangements*: Heinz Lachmann. *sd*: I. J. Citroen.

CAST: Herman Boubier (*Brand*), Rini Otte (*Willy, his daughter*), Matthew v. Eysden (*Ferdinand, his brother-in-law*), Cor Roys (*Director Moorman*).

Length of copy in National Film Archive: 7,290 ft. 81 mins.

Dist. in Holland: N. V. Marconi. *first showing*: October 25, 1936,

at the Tuschinski Theatre, Amsterdam. The film was reissued in 1953 in a re-edited version, distributed by Centrafilm.

KOMEDIE OM GELD is in some ways the most mysterious of Ophuls' films. On only two points are the critics agreed: that it was made in Holland and that it is about banking. Some writers think that the film was made in English and that its title was *The Trouble with Money*. Some think that it was a musical comedy. It is even difficult to date the film exactly; some French sources give the date as 1934, but it is certain that the film's Dutch premiere was in 1936. Fortunately, a copy has been preserved in the National Film Archive. It is perhaps worth giving the film's plot in some detail, both because there is so much speculation about it and because Ophuls himself has got the plot wrong in the *Cahiers du Cinéma* interview.

The film opens in a manner reminiscent of Brecht's *Dreigroschenoper*. A barker sings a song introducing the picture: this is a comedy about money, and this is how it began. The story concerns one Brand, who works for a banking concern. The first reel establishes that he has a shady brother-in-law. The second reel introduces a small boy who, in trying to steal some money, cuts a hole in Brand's brief-case. Brand is then sent to deliver £50,000. On the way, he stops to talk to his brother-in-law. When he arrives, he finds that the money has gone. Although Brand is released from jail for lack of evidence, everyone (including his daughter Willy, a P.T. instructress) believes that he is guilty. Both he and Willy suffer the consequences: Willy loses her job, and so does Brand. His money gone, Brand is about to commit suicide when he is offered the chairmanship of what seems to be a Building and Loan society. He does not realise that the offer has been made because Moorman, the shady director, knows that he will be able to get unlimited credit on the strength of Brand's putative £50,000.

At first of all goes well. Willy goes off to Switzerland; Brand suggests idealistic improvements in the company's housing scheme. Then Willy comes back with a fiancé, of whom Brand disapproves because he is a vagabond. Willy protests, and Brand answers that he only took the job to give her what she had missed. He now realises why he was offered the job, and when he explains this she tells him that he has done wrong. Brand decides to resign, and Moorman demands the £50,000. By a happy coincidence, Brand finds the original £50,000—it had fallen down a grating in the pavement. He returns the money to its rightful owner; and

he is thereupon sent to jail for two years.

The barker now reappears and sings: "The story can't end like this; Brand's innocence will be shown." And in a montage sequence it is shown—the boy who sliced his brief-case, and all the rest. We cut back to the barker; the little boy comes out of his big drum and announces the happy ending. Everyone rushes to the prison, Brand comes out, and they all join in the final chorus of the song.

The trouble with this film is that an amusing idea has been smothered by heaviness—in the acting, the script, and in the direction. There are a few bravura scenes: a nightmare sequence, an amazing shot of a typist with the camera placed *beneath* her forearms, and some atmospheric shots of the Amsterdam canals by Schufftan. Ophuls, in the *Cahiers du Cinéma* interview, stated that he thought the film was rather interesting and that it would stand up to re-showing today. This seems unlikely.

Ave Maria of Schubert

1936. FRANCE. *production*: Compagnie des Grands Artistes Internationaux. *dir*: Max Ophuls. *photo*: Franz Planer. *CAST*: Elisabeth Schumann, the singer. *Original length*: 495 ft. 5 mins. *Dist. in France*: C.F.F.

La Valse Brillante

1936. FRANCE. *production*: Compagnie des Grands Artistes Internationaux. *dir*: Max Ophuls. *photo*: Franz Planer. *mus*: Chopin. *CAST*: Alexander Brailowski, the pianist. *Original length*: 525 ft. 6 mins. *Dist. in France*: C.F.F.

LITTLE IS KNOWN about these two short films. They were commissioned by Emile Vuillermoz and were included with a number of other short bits in a kind of musical potpourri film, which was called *Music and Cinema*.

La Tendre Ennemie

1936. FRANCE. *production*: Eden Productions. *dir*: Max Ophuls. *sc*: Max Ophuls and Curt Alexander. Based on the play *L'Ennemie* by André-Paul Antoine. *dial*: André-Paul Antoine. *photo*: Eugène Schufftan, Lucien Colas. *edit*: Pierre de Hérain.

sets: Jacques Gotko. *mus:* Albert Wolff. *sd:* Antoine Archimbaud. *prod. dir:* Paul Bentata. *asst. dir:* Ralph Baum.

CAST: Simone Berriau (*Annette*), Georges Vitray (*Her Husband*), Jacqueline Daix (*Her Daughter*), Maurice Devienne (*Her Daughter's Fiancé*), Marc Valbel (*Rodrigo, the tiger tamer*), Lucien Nat (*Sailor*), Catherine Fonteney (*Annette's Mother*), Germaine Reuver (*Aunt Jette*), Laure Diana (*The Tart*), Camille Bert (*The Doctor*), Henri Marchand and André Simon (*Extra Servants*), Pierre Finaly (*Uncle Emile*).

Original length: 6,128 ft. 69 mins. *length at first U.K. showing:* 5,750 ft. 64 mins.

Dist. in France: S.E.L.F. *dist. in U.K.:* The Film Society. *first showing in France:* October, 1936. *first showing in London:* January 10, 1937, at the New Gallery.

BEFORE MAKING THIS film, Ophuls had already directed a production of Antoine's play *L'Ennemie* in Germany. As with Schnitzler, he has again softened the original work. The many changes between the play and the film are epitomised in the change of title: from 'The Enemy' to 'The Tender Enemy.' In Antoine's play, Annette ruins the lives of her fiancé, her husband and her lover, because woman is the natural and hereditary enemy of man. In the film, she kills off her husband and her lover, but we are told that this happens because her mother did not let her marry her fiancé, the sailor. This explains why she could not be happy with either of the other men, and why she made their lives miserable and finally brought about their deaths. Ophuls has inserted the story into the framework of an engagement party for Annette's daughter, which affords the chance of some amusing moments with two drunken extra servants.

In spite of his sentimentalising of the original, Ophuls succeeded in making a very charming film. And this time Simone Berriau was not miscast. As Arthur Vesselo commented in the *Monthly Film Bulletin*: "In opposing the system of loveless marriage, the film obviously runs the risk of emphasising an over-simple romantic solution; but apart from this intellectual objection, it is in every way—in construction, imagination, technique and fundamental cinematic understanding—a high achievement. Cutting and angles are elaborately conceived, neatly executed and full of meaning. . . . Dialogue is good, and every separate acting performance is individual and direct. . . . The insertion at one point of a memory within a memory is notable for the suggestive touches—the explanatory voice continuing in the background, and the visual hint of a hackney carriage still rolling on its way behind the action—which succeed in keeping its meaning

quite clear. The ingenuity of the original idea is equalled only by the subtle facility with which it is carried out."

Yoshiwara

1937. FRANCE. *production:* Les Films Excelsior. (Alternatively given in *La Cinématographie Française* as Milo Film). *dir:* Max Ophuls. *sc:* A. Lipp, W. Wilhelm, Dapoigny, Max Ophuls. From the novel *Yoshiwara* by Maurice Dekobra. *photo:* Eugène Schufftan. *camera op:* Portier. *edit:* P. Méguérien. *sets:* André and Léon Barsacq. *mus:* Paul Dessau. *sd:* Sauvion.

CAST: Pierre-Richard Wilm (*Serge Polenoff*), Sessue Hayakawa (*Ysamo, the coolie*), Michiko Tanaka (*Kohana*), Roland Toutain (*Pawlik*), Lucienne Le Marchand (*Namo, the head geisha girl*), Gabriello (*Pô, manager of the tea-house*), Camille Bert (*Commander of Battleship*), Foon Sen (*Kohana's Brother*); and Philippe Richard, Ky Duyen, Saillard, Bonvallet.

Length of copy in French Cinémathèque: 7,920 ft. 88 mins. (This version is not complete, and the original length is unknown).

Dist. in France: C. F. Lux. *first showing:* August 13, 1937, at the Olympia Cinema, Paris.

YOSHIWARA, THE GEISHA quarter of Tokyo, is the setting for this story of the love of a Russian naval officer for a well-born Japanese lady, forced by family reverses to turn geisha. But she also loves a young rickshaw coolie, and it is his jealousy, plus some complicated international espionage, which eventually brings about the deaths of all three.

The film is, quite simply, grotesque. Nor is the acting particularly distinguished. As the reviewer of *La Cinématographie Française* commented: "Pierre-Richard Wilm has great presence, but he seems to lack conviction. Sessue Hayakawa still conserves his handsome pathetic mask, but he seems bothered by the fact that he played the rôle in broken French, when, as a matter of fact, his voice was dubbed for the final version of the film." Unfortunately, the one sequence that was supposed to be worthy of Max Ophuls, the bath of the geisha girls, has been cut from the copy of the film in the Cinémathèque Française. The only remaining scene that calls for comment is that in which Wilm gets Michiko Tanaka to dress up in the European manner. He explains to her what opera is, and we see and hear a scene from *Die Zauberflöte*, and their return to his home in a sleigh. (The walls of the room in the Russian Embassy disappear and are replaced with painted backdrops evoking St. Petersburg.) Charles Bitsch (in *Cahiers du Cinéma*) calls this scene "insane"; it is also quite charming.

Werther

1938. FRANCE. *production:* Nero Film. *dir:* Max Ophuls. *sc:* Hans Wilhelm. *adapt:* Max Ophuls and Hans Wilhelm, from Goethe's *Sorrows of Young Werther*. *dial:* Fernand Crommelynck. *photo:* Eugène Schufftan. *camera op:* Portier, Borgassof, Stilly. *edit:* Gerald Bendsorp, Jean Sacha. *sets:* Eugène Lourié, Max Douy. *costumes:* Annette Sarradin. *mus:* Henri Herblay, on themes from Grétry, Bach, Mozart, Schubert and Beethoven (in particular, Beethoven's song "Ich Liebe Dich.") *sd:* Monnot. *asst. dir:* Henri Aisner.

CAST: Pierre-Richard Wilm (*Werther*), Annie Vernay (*Charlotte*), Jean Galland (*Albert Hochstätter*), Paulette Pax (*Aunt Emma*); and Henri Guisol, Jean Périer, Georges Vitray, Henri Herblay, Roger Legris, Maurice Schutz, Léon Larive, Philippe Richard, G. TERNY, Léonce Corne, Denise Kerny.

Original length: 7,650 ft. 85 mins.

Shooting commenced: June 15, 1938. *finished:* September 30, 1938. Studio François Ier.

Dist. in France: S.E.L.F. *first showing in Paris:* December 7, 1938, at the César Cinema.

CLAUDE BEYLIE HAS very pertinently remarked (in *Cahiers du Cinéma*, No. 81): "All his life, Ophuls adored Mozart, but he chose the music of Oscar Straus for his films. All his life he read Balzac and Stendhal, but he never dared adapt them for the screen. All his life, Goethe, the poet and dramatist, was his favourite author, but only once did he try to film a work by Goethe, and then he felt that he made a mess of it." M. Beylie characteristically feels that Ophuls was being too hard on himself, but once more Ophuls' judgment is right.

The main trouble with *Werther* is that Ophuls has vulgarised his subject. Goethe's *Werther* is a sensitive, intelligent young man who is presented to a girl whom he knows to be engaged to another man. Gradually, he begins to fall in love with her. After she marries her fiancé, *Werther* finds it too painful to watch their happiness and so goes away to another town. Despite the charms of a Miss B., he is unable to remain away from Charlotte and returns. He drinks a little more than usual, and despair begins to overcome him. All this time, Charlotte herself thinks of him as a charming, over-sensitive *Hausfreund*. Slowly she begins to realise that he is in love with her, and does all she can to smooth over the situation: she would like him to be a brother to her, if only he would accept this relationship. This *Werther* cannot do, and in their last interview he breaks down and kisses her. Half in love, half in anger, Charlotte tells him that he must never see her again. *Werther* then commits suicide.

From this pre-romantic 18th century work, Ophuls has made a sort of wild 19th century romantic melodrama. *Werther* loses all the intellectual stature he had in the book, and is thereby greatly diminished. Incomprehensibly, Charlotte waits until *Werther* asks for her hand in marriage before telling him that she is already engaged. Instead of drinking a little more than usual, Ophuls' *Werther* becomes a dissipated drunkard; and Ophuls adds an incredible brothel scene. Not content with this, he has provided Charlotte with a comic-relief Aunt, and, worst of all, made nonsense of the story by having Charlotte really in love with *Werther*. So, as in *Liebelei*, the original situation—*Werther* hopelessly in love with a woman who would like him as a brother—is softened into one in which all would have gone well if only Charlotte had not got engaged so quickly to Albert. Tragedy becomes pathos.

Taken on this level, however, the film is a very effective *comédie larmoyante*. With the use of blue tinting, the country scenes are very pretty; and, again with blue tinting, the brothel scene is in its way striking. Pierre-Richard Wilm is unobjectionable—he is not Goethe's *Werther*, but he fits well enough into Ophuls' conception of the rôle. Annie Vernay, who was soon to die so tragically, is charming as Charlotte.

Sans Lendemain

1939. FRANCE. *production:* Gray Film. *prod:* Gregor Rabinovitsch. *dir:* Max Ophuls. *sc:* Jean Villeme* and Jacot. *dial:* André-Paul Antoine. *photo:* Eugène Schufftan. *camera op:* Paul Portier, Delattre, Alekan. *edit:* L. Sejour, Jean Sacha. *sets:* Eugène Lourié, Max Douy. *mus:* Allan Gray. *conductor:* R. Goer. *sd:* Pierre Calvet. *asst. dir:* Henri Aisner, Andren.

CAST: Edwige Feuillère (*Evelyne "Babs" Morin*), Georges Rigaud (*Dr. Georges Brandon*), Daniel Lecourtois (*Armand, his friend*), Paul Azais (*Henri, singer and master of ceremonies at La Sirène*), Gabriello (*Mario, proprietor of La Sirène*), Georges Lannes (*Paul Mazurand*), Michel François (*Pierre, Evelyne's son*), Jeanne Marken (*Mme. Béchu, concierge of the pension*), Mady Berry (*Concierge of the block of flats*), Pauline Carton (*Ernestine, the Maid*).

Original length: 7,438 ft. 82 mins. (at first U.K. showing).

Shooting commenced: January 3, 1939. studios: Pathé Joinville,

* "Jean Villeme" was apparently Hans Wilhelm; in 1940, German names were not popular in France.

Billancourt, Pathé Francoeur.

B.B.F.C. cert: A. dist. in France: Ciné Alliance. dist. in U.K.: Studio One. first showing in Paris: March 20, 1940, at the Le Français Cinema. first showing in London: May 30, 1948, at Studio One.

IN THE "SIGHT AND SOUND" interview with Francis Koval, Ophuls complained that he had never seen an uncut version of *Sans Lendemain*, and that what he was not allowed to show was precisely what he liked best of all. Apart from this rather cryptic remark, his only other words about the film were: Not bad. And yet again he is right. From a story that has unanimously been qualified as novelettish, Ophuls made not a bad film. The critic of the *Monthly Film Bulletin* summed it up fairly well: "This unpretentious film can be most kindly described as 'inoffensive'. The mannerisms of the ageless Feuillère will be familiar to many, but her performance and that of Georges Rigaud lift the film a little from the banality of its novelettish story. Music is effectively used, particularly in suspense sequences. The direction is good and the photography excellent."

Edwige Feuillère herself has written: "*Sans Lendemain* was a story full of emotion, all in nuances, almost always in half-tones, an idea—finally—more literary than cinematic." Literary? On a certain level, perhaps. The film is concerned with one Evelyne Morin, an *entraineuse* in a cabaret with a small son to raise. One night she meets Georges, whom she has not seen for ten years. So that he will not realise how low she has sunk, she becomes involved with a gangster who supplies her with a flat, clothes and jewels with which to impress her old love. In flashbacks, we find out eventually why she never married Georges; her husband, a criminal, escaped from jail and threatened to murder Georges unless she returned to him.

Now her husband is dead, but it is too late. She has become too tightly involved with the gangster, and she must either go on working for him as a *poule de luxe* or he will send her to a brothel. Then, too, though she can lie to Georges for three days about her past, she cannot live a lifetime of lies. She sends her son off to Canada with Georges, promising to follow in a few weeks, and then disappears into the fog.

The dialogue is quite appropriate to the story: "3,000 francs, or I am lost", and "life doesn't give one a second chance; I'm not the same woman I was ten years ago." As the critic of *La Cinématographie Française* remarked, "Edwige Feuillère and the film are well matched."

De Mayerling à Sarajevo

1940. FRANCE. *production: B.U.P. Française. prod: Eugène Tuscherer. in charge of production: Ivan Foxwell. dir: Max Ophuls. sc: Curt Alexander. scenario: Carl Zuckmayer and Marcelle Maurette. dial: André-Paul Antoine, Marcelle Maurette, Jacques Natanson. photo: Curt Courant, Otto Heller. camera op: Robert Le Febvre, J. Mercanton, Viguier, Natteau. edit: Myriam and Ozer. sets: Jean d'Eaubonne. costumes: B. Balinsky. mus: Oscar Straus. orchestra conductor: Marcel Cariven. sd: Girardon and Yvonnet. asst. dir: Jean Faurez and Jean-Paul Dreyfus*.*

CAST: Edwige Feuillère (*Countess Sophie Chotek*), John Lodge (*Archduke Franz-Ferdinand*), Aimé Clariond (*Prince Montenuovo*), Jean Worms (*Emperor Franz Josef*), Gabrielle Dorziat (*Archduchess Maria Theresa*), Aimos (*Janatchek, the Archduke's valet*), Jean Debucourt (*Minister of Foreign Affairs*), Jean-Paul Dreyfus (*Prinzip, the assassin*); and Henri Bosc, Gaston Dubosc, Marcel André, Eddy Debray, Roussel, Colette Régis.

Original length: 8,000 ft. approx. 89 mins.

Shooting commenced: July 4, 1939. Shooting was interrupted on October, 28 1939, began again on December 20, 1939 and finished on January 30, 1940. Studios Epinay-Eclair and Billancourt. B.B.F.C. cert: A. dist. in France: C. F. Lux. dist. in U.K.: Film Traders. first showing in Paris: May 1, 1940, at the Marignan Cinema. first showing in London: September 6, 1947, at the Academy Cinema. English title: Sarajevo.

PRESUMABLY AN ATTEMPT to cash in on and repeat the great success of Litvak's *Mayerling*, this was the last film that Ophuls completed before leaving for America. It concerns the love affair of the Archduke Franz-Ferdinand with the Czech Countess Sophie Chotek. In spite of opposition from the Court, they marry and lead a somewhat uneventful life until the day when they are both assassinated in Sarajevo. Before the film was completed Ophuls was called up, and it was only finished thanks to an "end-of-film-leave" which he was granted in December, 1939. Nevertheless, the troubled circumstances in which the film was made are not alone sufficient to explain its comparative failure. The real difficulty is that the story effectively finishes with the marriage of the archduke and Sophie, and the rest of the film is somewhat anti-climactic.

The film's main appeal lies, as William Whitebait noted in his *New Statesman* review, in "its picture of Court life, seen with an eye that delights equally in elegance and absurdity."

* Now Jean-Paul Le Chanois, director of *L'Ecole Buissonnière*, *Papa, Maman, La Bonne et Moi*, etc.

Only an exact and playful taste could have devised the first meeting of the lovers (at the unveiling of a hideous statue of the emperor), the formidable box at the opera, the rides through the woods, the unbreakable etiquette, the stolen moments in a lifetime of tours and addresses."

The acting of the principals leaves a good deal to be desired. John Lodge is only adequate as Franz-Ferdinand, and Edwige Feuillère is not really in her element protesting "in the name of the thousands of oppressed Czechs" against the misdeeds of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. As the critic of *The Times* observed: "the film belongs to Mlle Gabrielle Dorziat. The scene she shares with Edwige Feuillère is particularly memorable, for all of outward elegance and inner civilisation are there."

L'Ecole des Femmes (unfinished)

1940. SWITZERLAND. *dir:* Max Ophuls. An adaptation of Molière's *L'Ecole des Femmes*. *photo:* Michel Kelber. *sets and costumes:* Christian Bérard.

CAST: Louis Jouvet, Madeleine Ozeray, and the Louis Jouvet Company.

IN THE MIDDLE of the exodus from Paris in 1940, Ophuls met Louis Jouvet at Aix-en-Provence. Jouvet proposed that Ophuls leave with him and his troupe for Geneva. There, with Swiss backing, they began to film the Jouvet company in a performance of Molière's *Ecole des Femmes*. After a few days of filming, the producer lost confidence in the idea, and the project was abandoned. Ophuls has described what he was trying to do in the *Cahiers du Cinéma* interview. "It was an experiment for me. The idea was that I should film a performance of the play, before an audience, without trying to make a cinematic adaptation of the play. I wanted to show the actors when they left the stage and follow them into the wings while the dialogue on stage continued. . . . I hardly filmed more than the overture: a camera traverses the theatre, above the heads of the audience, with Jouvet, seated on the crane, putting on his make-up, unseen by the audience in the darkening theatre. Then the camera passes through the curtain, disappears, and Arnolphe remains alone on the stage. The first sequence was the last. Three or four days later I left for America."

Vendetta

1946. U.S.A. *production:* RKO-Radio. *prod:* Howard Hughes. *dir:* Mel Ferrer (also Max Ophuls, *inter alia*). *sc:* W. R. Burnett, based on *Colomba* by Prosper Mérimée. *photo:* Frank (Franz) Planer, Al Gilks. *edit:* Stuart Gilmore.

CAST: Faith Domergue, Nigel Bruce.

B.B.F.C. cert: A. *dist. in U.S.A. and U.K.:* RKO-Radio.

MAX OPHULS ARRIVED in Hollywood at the end of 1941. After many promises, many projects, he at last began work, with Preston Sturges, on a new film: *Vendetta*. But the producer did not like his work, and after several days he was dismissed. Subsequently, *Vendetta* was taken over by Preston Sturges, then by Stuart Heisler, and finally by Mel Ferrer. The film cost \$3,200,000 and was an attempt by the producer, Howard Hughes, to launch a new discovery, Faith Domergue. It was not a great success.

The Exile

1947. U.S.A. *production:* Universal-International, in association with The Fairbanks Co. *prod:* Douglas Fairbanks, Jr. *dir:* Max Ophuls. *sc. and dial:* Douglas Fairbanks, Jr. *photo:* Frank (Franz) Planer. *edit:* Ted J. Kent. *prod. design:* Howard Bay. *costumes:* Dwight Franklin and Laure Lourie. *action sequences designed by:* David Sharpe. *mus:* Frank Skinner. *sd:* Leslie I. Carey, William Hedgcock.

CAST: Douglas Fairbanks, Jr. (*Charles Stuart*), Maria Montez (*The Countess*), Paule Croset (*Katie*), Henry Daniell (*Col. Ingram*), Nigel Bruce (*Sir Edward Hyde*), Robert Coote (*Pinner*), Otto Waldis (*Jan*), Eldon Gorst (*Seymour*), Milton A. Owen (*Wilcox*), Colin Keith-Johnson (*Capt. Bristol*), Ben H. Wright (*Milbanke*), Colin Kenny (*Ross*), Peter Shaw (*Higson*), Will Stanton (*Tucket*). *Original length:* 8,240 ft. 92 mins.

B.B.F.C. cert: U. *dist. in U.S.A.:* Universal-International. *dist. in U.K.:* General Film Distributors. *U.S. release date:* December, 1947. *first showing in London:* September 23, 1948, at the New Gallery Cinema.

THANKS TO AN old friend, Robert Siodmak, Ophuls was next engaged to direct *The Exile* for Douglas Fairbanks, Jr. Ophuls got on very well with Fairbanks from the beginning; and Fairbanks accorded him almost complete freedom to make the film as he wanted.

The story concerns Charles II during his exile in Holland. The arrival of a large force of Roundheads forces him to

disguise himself as a farm labourer, and he falls in love with Katie. Eventually he is discovered, and after a duel in a windmill the Roundheads are captured, Charles bids farewell to Katie and returns to England. From this apocryphal story, Ophuls made what the critic of the *Manchester Guardian* called "a silly, schoolboyish, unimportant costume film. It is, one repeats it, a thoroughly unimportant film, with, however, two great virtues: it is pictorially lovely, like a black-and-white* reproduction of a series of pictures by Wouwermann. It has, besides, the speed and rhythm which belong only to a film, cannot be borrowed from any other medium, and which when added to pictorial beauty, produces flashes of what can only be described as the poetry of the screen."

The film was also notable for the performance as Katie of a 23-year-old Tahiti-born actress named Paule Croset, who seems to have disappeared thereafter.

Letter from an Unknown Woman

1948. U.S.A. production: Universal-International. A Rampart Production. prod: John Houseman. dir: Max Ophuls. sc: Howard Koch. Based on the story of the same name by Stefan Zweig. photo: Frank (Franz) Planer. edit: Ted J. Kent. sets: Alexander Golitzen. costumes: Travis Banton. mus: Daniele Amfitheatrof. sd: Leslie I. Carey, Glenn E. Anderson. prod. co-ordinator: John Hambleton. asst. dir: John F. Sherwood.

CAST: Joan Fontaine (*Lisa Berndle*), Louis Jourdan (*Stefan Brand*), Mady Christians (*Frau Berndle*), Marcel Journet (*Johann Stauffer*), Art Smith (*John*), Howard Freeman (*Herr Kastner*), John Good (*Lt. Leopold von Kaltnegger*), Leo P. Pessin (*Stefan, junior*), Otto Waldis (*Concierge*), Erskine Sanford (*Porter*), Sonia Bryden (*Frau Spitzer*).

Original length: 8,100 ft. approx. 90 mins. Apparently cut in the U.S.A. to 87 mins. at first British showing: 7,844 ft. 86 mins. B.B.F.C. cert: A. dist. in U.S.A.: Universal-International. dist. in U.K.: Eros Films. U.S. release date: June, 1948. first showing in Britain: On release in outer London and the provinces in January, 1950; first shown in central London at the Cameo Polytechnic Cinema on July 17, 1950.

OPHULS HAS TOLD US that he greatly enjoyed making *The Exile*, partly because of Fairbanks and partly because he at last began to feel at home in Hollywood. Before the film was finished, the scriptwriter Howard Koch began to discuss the

* The American copy of the film, at least, was in sepia.

possibility of Ophuls filming Stefan Zweig's novelette, *Letter from an Unknown Woman*. Again, he had complete freedom; with Howard Koch, he even did some re-working of the script. The film was not a great success in America at the time, but it has recently had a very successful career on television. In England, the distributors did not at first show it to the press and released it surreptitiously in the suburbs and provinces. There it was discovered by several critics, and it was finally brought to the Cameo Polytechnic.

In *Letter from an Unknown Woman*, Ophuls has once more softened his original. The Zweig story is in the form of a letter from Lisa to Stefan, written just before her death. In it she tells him of how she loved him as a child, of the three nights she spent with him later and of the birth of their child. Since he dropped her, and since she needed money for their boy, she became a courtesan. She was a great success, until one night she saw Stefan again at a night-club; unable to resist, she left her current lover and went off for a night with Stefan. The next morning she was sure that he would remember who she was, but he did not. Soon after, her son died of typhus; and, writing the letter a few days later, she is herself about to succumb.

Here the letter ends, and there is only one final paragraph. Stefan tries desperately to recall who Lisa might be, but he cannot quite remember. Nevertheless, he is moved and saddened.

In the film version, Lisa does not become a courtesan; instead, she marries a kindly older man, to whom she tells all. After her second visit to Stefan (but in the film she does not spend the night), the husband challenges Stefan to a duel. At first, Stefan has no intention of meeting this challenge. But, after re-living Lisa's long life of devotion through her letter, he changes his mind and goes to a certain death.

Karel Reisz wrote (in *Sequence*, New Year, 1952): "This new situation, though it comes off brilliantly as a dramatic device, gives a crude, perverse kind of poetic justice to the climax and clearly breaks faith with the original conception of the character. It is typical of Ophuls' approach that while he has softened the ending he has also expanded and intensified the bitterness of Lisa's last encounter with her lover. Stefan's degeneration from a gay, carelessly amorous young man to a smooth-talking, mechanically efficient seducer is caught in a poignant, brilliantly realised scene, but it is later invalidated by his final gesture to accept the duel. Again, the change from the original panders to the moral judgment which the

situation would evoke from an audience today. It destroys the ruthless logic which Zweig brought to the situation for the sake of a dramatic effect. It is perhaps because of these inconsistencies that the film leaves one, in retrospect, with a slight sense of dissatisfaction. Only by a greater depth of analysis could he fill the void left by deviating from the story's emotional logic, and this Ophuls does not supply. His approach is oblique . . . but the real source of Lisa's passion somehow never emerges: it is too superficially motivated and remains, at last, unassessed. But when this has been said, there remains a richness of observation and a feeling for the small situation that is deeply rewarding: . . . the episodes of Lisa's childhood and the witty, delicately realised love scene in the Prater."

The idea of the imaginary voyage in the Prater, by the way, is reminiscent of the imaginary trip to St. Petersburg in *Yoshiwara*; but this time it is much more successful. The film is further distinguished by the touching performance of Joan Fontaine and by the photography of Franz Planer, cameraman also for *Liebelei*. In spite of certain flaws, this was certainly the best of Ophuls' American films, as it was also the most "European" in mood and atmosphere.

Caught

1948. U.S.A. production: Enterprise Studios. prod: Wolfgang Reinhardt. dir: Max Ophuls. sc: Arthur Laurents, from the novel *Wild Calendar* by Libbie Block. photo: Lee Garmes. edit: Robert Parrish. sets: Frank Sylos. mus: Frederick Hollander (Friedrich Holländer). mus. dir: Rudolph Polk. sd: Max Hutchinson.

CAST: Barbara Bel Geddes (*Leonora*), James Mason (*Larry Quinada*), Robert Ryan (*Smith Ohlrig*), Frank Ferguson (*Dr. Hoffmann*), Curt Bois (*Franzi*), Marcia Mae Jones (*Leonora's sister*), Ruth Brady (*Maxine*), Natalie Schaefer (*Dorothy Dale*), Art Smith (*Psychiatrist*).

Original length: 7,896 ft. 88 mins.

B.B.F.C. cert: A. dist. in U.S.A. and U.K.: M-G-M. U.S. release date: March, 1949. first showing in London: July 25, 1949, at the Empire, Leicester Square.

AFTER LETTER FROM AN UNKNOWN WOMAN, Ophuls left Universal; his next film was *Caught*, and he tells us in the *Cahiers du Cinéma* interview that on this film he had some

trouble with the producers concerning the script. "The film," he said, "goes off the rails towards the end. Up to the last ten minutes, though, it wasn't bad."

Indeed, the script was not too promising. It is the story of the disastrous marriage of a young and ambitious girl to a fabulously rich, but vicious man. Subsequently, she falls in love with a young doctor, but when she realises that she is going to have a child by him, she returns to her husband. The two men meet and the truth is told. The millionaire will not release Leonora, who stays on with him for the sake of the baby. Later he dies of a heart attack; the baby also dies, and Leonora and the doctor are finally reunited.

Again, Ophuls made something stylistically interesting out of a novelettish subject. Paul Dehn (in the *Sunday Chronicle*) found that the film had been made in what he called "the Orson Welles idiom—overlapping conversation, dramatic lighting, a sultry sense of claustrophobia; but it is an idiom on which the director, Max Ophuls, has magnificently improved." Gavin Lambert (in *Sequence*, Autumn, 1949) commented: "It is a notable film because the dialogue (Arthur Laurents) and Ophuls' treatment bring conviction—the sketchy, impossible figure of the millionaire excepted—to its material. The girl and the doctor, played with charm and brilliance by Barbara Bel Geddes and James Mason, become genuine, likeable human beings; some minor characters are acidly drawn; tension and atmosphere are established—and held continuously by the mannered but pleasantly intimate direction. . . . The elegantly low-key camerawork, the notably attractive designs and unerringly timed editing, make it a film of considerable stylistic interest as well as peculiar vitality."

The Reckless Moment

1949. U.S.A. production: Columbia. A Walter Wanger Production. prod: Walter Wanger. dir: Max Ophuls. sc: Henry Garson and R. W. Soderburg. adapt: Mel Dinelli and Robert E. Kent, from a "Ladies' Home Journal" story, *The Blank Wall*, by Elizabeth Sanxay Holding. photo: Burnett Guffey. edit: Gene Havlick. sets: Cary Odell, Frank Tuttle. costumes: Jean Louis. mus: Hans Salter. mus. dir: Morris Stoloff. sd: Russell Malmgren. asst. dir: Earl Bellamy.

CAST: James Mason (*Martin Donnelly*), Joan Bennett (*Lucia Harper*), Geraldine Brooks (*Beatrice Harper*), Henry O'Neill (*Mr. Harper*, *Lucia's father-in-law*), David Blair (*David Harper*), Roy

Roberts (*Nagel*), Frances Williams (*Sybil, the cook*); and Shepperd Strudwick.

Original length: 7,374 ft. 82 mins.

B.B.F.C. cert: A. *dist. in U.S.A. and U.K.:* Columbia. *U.S. release date:* November, 1949. *first showing in London:* December 9, 1949, at the Odeon, Leicester Square.

THE RECKLESS MOMENT was the last of Ophuls' American films. It concerns a mother's attempt to save her family from becoming involved in scandal and blackmail, arising from her daughter's innocent but compromising implication in a murder. She succeeds finally in bringing about a change of heart in the blackmailer; and he dies in an accident, taking all the blame upon himself.

Claude Beylie maintains in his book on Ophuls that this film is a melodrama in appearance only: the character of Lucia Harper (the mother) is "authentically tragic, dare I say she is a tragic heroine of Racine?" Gavin Lambert, reviewing the film in *The Monthly Film Bulletin*, took a more serious point of view: "Here, again, the material is not wholly satisfactory. But Ophuls' handling of it and a well-constructed script with some excellent dialogue (one notices on the credits the name of Mel Dinelli, responsible for *The Window*) make it unexpectedly absorbing. Where the film excels is in its incidental observation of family life, in making the mother's predicament real and immediate; the second half, in which attention switches to the character of the blackmailer and his change of heart, is not completely convincing, though the players, Joan Bennett and James Mason, create real human beings and the handling very nearly brings it off."

Whether or not because the picture was largely shot on location and outside the studios, *The Reckless Moment* seems to be the most "American" of Ophuls' Hollywood films (e.g., the scenes in the drugstore and the bus station).

La Ronde

1950. FRANCE. *production:* Sacha Gordiner. *prod:* Sacha Gordiner. *dir: of production:* Ralph Baum. *dir:* Max Ophuls. *sc:* Jacques Natanson and Max Ophuls. Based on Arthur Schnitzler's play *Reigen*. *dial:* Jacques Natanson. *photo:* Christian Matras. *camera op:* Alain Douarinou, E. Bourreaud. *edit:* Azar, S. Rondeau. *sets:* Jean d'Eaubonne, Marpoux, M. Frederix. *costumes:* Georges Annenkov. *mus:* Oscar Straus and Joë Hajos. *orchestra conductor:* Poussig. *sd:* Pierre Calvet. *asst. dir:* Paul Feyder, Tony Aboyant.

CAST: Anton Walbrook (*The Narrator*), Simone Signoret (*The Whore*), Serge Reggiani (*The Soldier*), Simone Simon (*The Chambermaid*), Daniel Gélin (*The Young Man*), Danielle Darrieux (*The Married Lady*), Fernand Gravey (*The Husband*), Odette Joyeux (*The Grisette*), Jean-Louis Barrault (*The Poet*), Isa Miranda (*The Actress*), Gérard Philipe (*The Lieutenant*).

Original length: 8,730 ft. 97 mins.

Shooting commenced: January 23, 1950. *finished:* March 18, 1950. Studio St. Maurice.

B.B.F.C. cert: X. *dist. in France:* Gamma-Jeanne Films. *dist. in U.K.:* Curzon (G.C.T. Ltd.). *first showing:* September 5, 1950, at the Cinema d'été, Monte Carlo. In Paris, the film opened on September 27, 1950, at the Cinemas Balzac, Helder, Scala and Vivienne. *first showing in London:* April 27, 1951, at the Curzon Cinema.

THE MODERATE SUCCESS achieved by *Reckless Moment* in America led to Walter Wanger's project of shooting *La Duchesse de Langeais* (after Balzac) in Europe, Ophuls directing, and starring Greta Garbo and James Mason. Ophuls left for Paris in 1949, but nothing ever came of this ambitious project to tempt Garbo back to the screen. Tired of drawing his salary in idleness, Ophuls jumped at the chance of filming Schnitzler's *Reigen*, a favourite work.

Schnitzler's play, written in 1897, was far from being a picture of gay Vienna, Strauss waltzes, glitter and froth. He belonged to a group of writers, the most famous of them being Hugo von Hofmannsthal. As Ilsa Barea pointed out in her preface to the English edition of *Reigen*, they were all alike in that they tried "to express the feeling of nervous tension, self-searching and sad futility behind the scintillating social façade; they rebelled against the solid descriptive realism of an older generation of writers, and, drifting with the European current, concentrated on what they called *Nervenkunst*, an art of the nerves."

As with *Liebelei* and *Letter from an Unknown Woman*, Ophuls modified and sweetened his original. Karel Reisz (in *Sequence*, New Year, 1952) pointed this out most clearly "In *La Ronde*, Ophuls' predilection for romanticising grim, realistic material reaches its extreme. The script of *La Ronde* gives the episodes a framework of indulgent satire. The cupid behind Schnitzler's dialogues is, more properly, blind, working in the face of social convention and in spite of the fear of disease. In his hands, the ten incidents make almost the opposite point from Ophuls' love-makes-the-world-go-round game. This drastic re-orientation once accepted, the film remains an extremely witty and enjoyable artifice. It is

graced with Ophuls' most dazzling technical virtuosity and some exceptionally fine performances."

Other English critics substantially agreed with this judgment. Some found that the acting in the last half of the film was not up to the standard of the first episodes; and, indeed, Odette Joyeux, Jean-Louis Barrault, Isa Miranda and Gérard Philipe were not at their best. Some pointed out the excellent photography of Christian Matras, the literally unforgettable waltz by Oscar Straus, and the fine performance of Danielle Darrieux. At the box-office, in France, Britain and elsewhere, Ophuls' bitter-sweet sexual comedy was immensely successful.

Some French critics found a good deal more in the film than their English colleagues. Henri Agel (in *Le Cinéma, a-t-il une Ame?*) said: "And who knows whether the bitter, airy libertinage of *La Ronde* is not an inverse form of the nostalgia for purity?" Claude Beylie went even further: "I do not know of any more despairing work, crueller under a frivolous surface, of a more immaculate quality, and, beyond its swirling frenzy, more bare and stark. It is not necessary to dig very deep to see what skeleton hides beneath the glabrous faces of these dandies, nor to see that these women are damned, and that the trouble comes ultimately from the fact that the world is round. . . . If we decipher the paradox, we will see that *La Ronde* is a film which traces beneath our very eyes the mysterious frontier where the love of art and the art of love meet."

Le Plaisir

1951. FRANCE. production: C.C.F.C.—Stera Films. dir.: Max Ophuls. sc.: Jacques Natanson and Max Ophuls. Based on the stories *Le Masque*, *La Maison Tellier* and *Le Modèle* by Guy de Maupassant. dial: Jacques Natanson. photo: Christian Matras (*Le Masque* and *Maison Tellier*), and Agostini (*Le Modèle*). camera op.: Jean Lalier, Roland Paillas, Changlesy. edit: Léonide Azar. sets: Jean d'Eaubonne. costumes: Georges Annenkov. mus.: Joë Hajos and Maurice Yvain. sd.: Jean Rieul, Pierre Calvet. prod. dir.: François Harispuru, Ben Barkay. asst. dir.: Jean Valère, Tony Aboyant.

CAST: "Le Masque": Claude Dauphin (*The Doctor*), Gaby Morlay (*The Wife*), Jean Galland (*The Husband*) Gaby Bruyère (*The Dancer*). "La Maison Tellier": Madeleine Renaud (*Mme Tellier*), Danielle Darrieux (*Rosa*), Ginette Leclerc (*Flora*), Mila Parély (*Raphaële*), Pauline Dubost (*Fernande*), Jean Gabin (*Jospeh Rivet*),

Helena Manson (*Mme Rivet*), Louis Seigner, Jean Mayer, Henri Crémieux, Balpêtré (*Clients of the Maison Tellier*), Pierre Brasseur (*The Pedlar*). "Le Modèle": Daniel Gélin (*Jean*), Jean Servais (*Guy de Maupassant*), Simone Simon (*Josephine*). narrator: Jean Servais (Peter Ustinov in the English version).

Original length: 8,550 ft. 95 mins. length at first U.K. showing: 8,253 ft. 92 mins.

Shooting commenced: June 7, 1951. finished: November 12, 1951 Studios de Boulogne (Seine). Exteriors at Trouville and around Paris.

B.B.F.C. cert.: X. dist. in France and U.K.: Columbia. first showing in Paris: February 29, 1952, at the Normandie and Rex Cinemas. first showing in Britain: At the Monseigneur Cinema, Edinburgh, during the 1952 Edinburgh Festival. The film opened for a season at Studio One, London, on February 5, 1953.

IN SPITE OF THE considerable success of *La Ronde*, Ophuls had some difficulty in raising money for his next production. *Le Plaisir* is drawn from three short stories by Guy de Maupassant: *Le Masque*, *La Maison Tellier* and *Le Modèle*. (Originally, the third story was to be *Paul's Wife*, but this idea was abandoned.) *The Mask* is a rather macabre story of an old man, reluctant to give up his youth, who goes out to the Palais de la Danse every night wearing a mask which makes him look young again. *La Maison Tellier* is the story of what happened when Madame Tellier closed down her brothel for one day in order to permit herself and her girls to attend her niece's first communion. In *The Model*, a young artist goads his mistress into attempting suicide. She jumps from the window, but only breaks her legs; nevertheless, she is now a hopeless invalid and, stung by remorse, he marries her.

Gavin Lambert wrote in the *Monthly Film Bulletin*: "It cannot be said that Maupassant responds quite so well to [Ophuls'] particular style, of which the rich, virtuoso elaboration sometimes blurs the sting and the irony. This is particularly noticeable in *La Maison Tellier*, where, in spite of the beautiful, idyllic quality of the country scenes, the irony of the episode in the church, the girls are not firmly, hardly, enough characterised—they are not, really, provincial prostitutes, any more than the Norman church looks like a real Norman church." Richard Winnington (*News Chronicle*) also wrote critically of the film: "Using three Maupassant stories to point out the paradoxical deceptions of pleasure, Ophuls tends to stress the obvious with a Teutonic broadness that has the effect of a constant nudge in the ribs. Cynicism and sentimentality substitute for irony and melancholy, . . ."

Needless to say, Claude Beylie found more in the film than met the eye. The presiding spirit behind the film, he believes, is not Maupassant but Pascal. "The film is a vigorous demystification of all that is considered diverting. The Palais de la Danse and Mme Tellier's are described as virtual reflections, hideous and gleaming, of Hell. But why, then, are the colours so gay? (The film was made in black and white, but it was *dreamed* and *thought* in colour.) Why is temptation so imperious that the doctor plunges back into the ball?" Why, indeed? "Because if pleasure is an easy thing, happiness is not. Is happiness, then, the strait gate, the bitter lucidity of the awakening after the intoxication of the feast? Is it the sad morrow of the mad ball. . .?"

Technically, *Le Plaisir* is one of Ophuls' most lavish films. In one instance his mania for the tracking shot went perhaps a little too far. When we first see the brothel, it is brightly lit and all the windows are open. The camera moves up the façade as far as the first floor and then moves along the front of the house, around the side, into a nook, and so on. As the camera moves, the shot is "justified" by Madeleine Renaud, at ten o'clock in the evening, going from window to window to water her window-boxes. But, after all, if there is one significant thing about a *maison close*, it is surely that it is *close*! On the other hand, Ophuls achieves perhaps his finest and most meaningful tracking shot in the church sequence from the same story, when the camera moves up a diagonal line of sculptured angels, following a shaft of light, cuts outside to the steeple, then back to the topmost angel, and then slowly descends the beam of light back to the congregation.

In the *Cahiers du Cinéma* interview, incidentally, Ophuls tells us that when d'Eaubonne brought him his drawing for the church, he protested that it looked like an Austrian building. When d'Eaubonne explained, however, that it was a composite of a church in Spain—near the French border—and a Norman church, he withdrew his objection.

Madame de . . .

1953. FRANCE/ITALY. *production*: Franco-London Films—Film Indus-Rizzoli. *dir. of production*: Ralph Baum. *dir.*: Max Ophuls. *sc.*: Marcel Achard, Max Ophuls and Annette Wademant. Based on the novel *Madame de . . .* by Louise de Vilmorin. *dial.*:

Marcel Achard. *photo*: Christian Matras. *camera op.*: Alain Douarinou. *edit*: Borys Lewin. *sets*: Jean d'Eaubonne. *costumes*: Georges Annenkov and Rosine Delamare. *mus.*: Oscar Straus and Georges van Parys. *sd.*: Antoine Petitjean. *asst. dir.*: Willy Picard.

CAST: Danielle Darrieux (*Madame de*), Charles Boyer (*Monsieur de*), Vittorio de Sica (*Baron Donati*), Jean Debucourt (*The Jeweller*), Lia de Léa (*Monsieur de's Mistress*), Mireille Perrey (*Madame de's Nurse*); and Jean Galland, M. Peyret, M. Salina, A. Michel, Paul Azais, Jean Carmet.

Original length: 9,206 ft. 102 mins.

Shooting commenced: April 8, 1953. Studios de Boulogne (Seine). *B.B.F.C. cert.*: A. *dist. in France*: Gaumont. *dist. in U.K.*: Miracle Films. *first showing in Paris*: September 16, 1953, at the Colisée and Marivaux Cinemas. *first showing in London*: March 26, 1954, at the Cameo Polytechnic Cinema.

OPHULS' NEXT FILM, *Madame de . . .*, was adapted from a short novel by Louise de Vilmorin. It is the story of how a pair of ear-rings, given by Monsieur de to his wife, bring about her downfall. She sells them to pay off her debts and they are bought back by her husband, who gives them as a present to his mistress. She, back in her native South America and pressed for cash, also sells them. They are next bought by a diplomat, who comes to Paris, falls in love with Madame de, and gives her the ear-rings. Monsieur de thereby discovers her infidelity, takes the ear-rings from her and returns them to the diplomat, telling him the whole story. Revolted by Madame de's lies to him, he throws her over; made desperate by the loss of her one true love, Madame de goes into a decline and dies.

Again, the film was criticised for the over-decoration and over-elaboration of Ophuls' style. Lindsay Anderson wrote of it in *Sight and Sound* (April-June, 1951): "The camera is never still; every shot has the tension of a conjuring trick. The sleight of hand is dazzling, but fatally distracting. It was impossible to adapt the novel without either gratuitous expansion or the substitution of an altogether more detailed and seductive style. . . . Ophuls has chosen the latter solution. With a supple, ingenious, glittering flow of images that is aesthetically the diametric opposite of Mme de Vilmorin's chaste prose, he has made the film an excuse for a succession of rich decorative displays. Christian Matras' lighting has his usual sophisticated gloss, and the settings by d'Eaubonne exploit to the full the habitual charms of period decor. In all this visual frou-frou it is not surprising that the characters become lost, and the interior development of their drama is

almost completely unobserved. This is the more regrettable since the actors . . . present their exteriors remarkably well. Without exploration of these relationships, however, and a more serious irony, the story is reduced to a series of adroit, finally rather tedious, manoeuvres round the persistent ear-rings."

In the *Monthly Film Bulletin*, Karel Reisz commented: "Its extreme emphasis on decoration is all the more surprising since the director has attempted to inflate the symmetrical literary exercise of the original . . . into a tragic love story of far greater complexity. The material cannot stretch to this, and the result is an uneven, often tedious film in which one only admires occasional touches of technical bravura."

In France, *Madame de* . . . was a success neither with the public nor with many of the critics. But Claude Beylie contends that this was because they had only a superficial understanding of the film. He believes that it has very little to do with Mme de Vilmorin, but much more with Mme de La Fayette and the Tolstoi of *Anna Karenina*. *Madame de* . . . "is Ophuls' swan-song, his requiem. It remained for him to sign his testament, a glowing testament which will be the crowning of the fresco, the allegro furioso of the symphony, his *Zauberflöte: Lola Montès*."

Lola Montès

1955. FRANCE/GERMANY. *production*: Gamma Films—Florida (Paris) and Oska Films (Munich), *dir.*: Max Ophuls. *sc.*: Max Ophuls, Annette Wademant and Franz Geiger. Based on *La Vie Extraordinaire de Lola Montès*, by Cecil St. Laurent. *dial.*: Jacques Natanson. *photo*: Christian Matras. *camera op.*: Alain Douarinou. *col.*: Eastman Colour. CinemaScope. *edit*: Madeleine Gug. *sets*: Jean d'Eaubonne, Willy Schatz. *costumes*: Georges Annenkov and (for Martine Carole) Marcel Escoffier. *mus.*: Georges Auric. *sd.*: Antoine Petitjean. *asst.*: Tony Aboyant, Ulrich Pickard, Schlissleder.

CAST: Martine Carole (*Lola Montès*), Peter Ustinov (*Circus Master*), Anton Walbrook (*King of Bavaria*), Ivan Desny (*James*), Will Quadflieg (*Lizst*), Oscar Werner (*The Student*), Lise Delamare (*Mrs. Craigie*), Henri Guisol (*Maurice*), Paulette Dubost (*Josephine*), Willy Eichberger (*Lola's Doctor*), and Beatrice Arnac, Hélène Manson, Jacques Fayet, Daniel Mandaille, Piéral, Willy Rösner, Friedrich Domin, Werner Finck, Gustav Waldau.

Original length: 12,600 ft. 140 mins. Cuts reduced this to 9,900 ft. (110 mins.); the film was then re-edited by Etienne Muze and shown finally at a length of 8,100 ft. (90 mins.).

Shooting commenced: February 28, 1955. *finished*: July 29, 1955. Studios Geiseltasteig (Munich), Joinville (Paris) and Victorine (Nice). Exterior shooting in Bavaria, on the Côte d'Azur and around Paris.

B.B.F.C. cert.: A. *dist. in France*: Gamma Films. *dist. in U.K.*: Regent Films. The original version opened on December 23, 1955, at the Cinemas Le Français and Marignan in Paris, and on January 12, 1956, at the Luitpold Theatre, Munich. The cut version was first shown on January 20, 1956. The re-edited version opened at the Monte Carlo cinema, Paris, on February 22, 1957. The re-edited version opened for a season at the Cameo Royal cinema in London on November 22, 1957.

LOLA MONTÈS, adapted from a popular novel, was planned as a super-production, to be made in French, German, and English versions, with an international cast, in CinemaScope and Eastman Colour. The film cost over 650 million francs, and was one of the biggest commercial flops of all time.

The reasons are not difficult to find: its audience expected a Martine Carole super-production about the scandalous life of Lola Montès; what they got was something closely resembling an *avant-garde* film. It was also a difficult film to follow, because of its unusual narrative technique. The producers' first solution was to cut. They reduced the film from 140 minutes to 110 minutes. This, naturally, did not help much. Then they tried to recoup on the English version. They re-edited the film behind Ophuls' back, while he was on vacation in Germany. When he saw what they had done (the film had shrunk to 90 minutes, and was completely re-edited), he was furious. All he could do was to prevent this cut version being shown at the French Film Festival in London. (Later, it appeared at the Cameo-Royal: it was not a great success.) A re-edited version of *Lola Montès* was also done in France. It was presented on the Champs Elysées when Ophuls was already in hospital—where he was to die a few weeks later.

Worst of all, it seems that the original negative has disappeared—or rather, was cut up for the preparation of the re-edited version. Prints of the cut version, however, still exist in Paris.

Ophuls has told us in an interview in *Arts* (April, 1956) of the genesis of the film: "When it was proposed I do 'Lola' it seemed to me that the subject was completely foreign to me. I don't like those lives during which a great many things happen. At the same time I was reading the newspapers and I was struck by a series of news items which, directly or indirectly, took me back to Lola: Judy Garland's nervous

breakdown, the sentimental adventures of Zsa Zsa Gabor. I meditated on the tragic brevity of careers today. The questions asked by the audience in 'Lola' were inspired by certain radio programmes."

In view of the fact that only the re-edited version of *Lola Montès* has been publicly shown in England, it is perhaps worthwhile to recount the film in some detail. It begins in a circus in New Orleans towards the end of the nineteenth century. The ringmaster introduces Lola Montès, and tells the audience they are going to hear her life story: she will answer all their questions. A line-up of chorus girls is seen first in a red light, then in an orange. The camera revolves through 360 degrees round Lola, chandeliers begin to move up and down, all turns red, and someone screams out: "*Does she remember her past?*"

Thereupon begins the first flashback. Lola is travelling through Italy with Franz Lizst. Realising their affair is over, they decide to part.

We return briefly to the circus. Someone asks about her childhood and after a *tableau vivant* of Lola and her mother we cut to Lola crossing the Atlantic with her mother and her mother's lover. Then we move to a theatre in Paris: Lola is unhappy—she is afraid the play will end sadly. There follows an amazing sequence of vertical crane shots while the characters move horizontally on the landings of a three-flight staircase and Lola goes to meet the man her mother has arranged for her to marry. At the last minute she breaks away, and we have another sequence on the staircase as Lola descends. Her mother's lover saves Lola—by marrying her.

Back at the circus Lola appears in a wedding dress on a merry-go-round with her "husband." As they revolve clockwise, the camera revolves counter-clockwise, with brilliant effect. We flashback briefly to Lola in Scotland with her new husband. He is drunken and brutal, and she runs off. The ringmaster then describes Lola's life in Paris, and her first appearances on the stage.

The next flashback is to Nice, where Lola interrupts her dance to slap the face of her lover, the orchestra conductor. She has just learned that he is a married man. Then the ringmaster, just beginning his career, visits Lola and offers a job with the circus. She refuses, saying, "If you ever see me again, it will be for the worst."

We return to the circus: Lola is hoisted up into the air to the platform from which she will make her nightly jump. The

ringmaster calls out, "Higher! Higher!". Lola arrives at the top.

We flashback to the summit of Lola's career—Bavaria, where she became the mistress of the king. (This is the longest of the flashbacks.) But their idyll does not last. The people disapprove of the king's liaison, and revolution breaks out. Lola is spirited off by a young student, who proposes marriage; but she refuses. "Bavaria was my last chance. I have lived too much, loved too much. It's all over. There's something broken inside me."

We return to the circus. Lola gets ready, the safety net is taken away and she jumps. We next see her in a cage where, for the price of one dollar, any man may kiss her hand. A long line forms and the camera, in a long, long crane shot (cut to some extent in the second and third versions) moves away from Lola back along the queue of men, back until we can no longer see Lola, only the outlines of the cage. Curtains come together and the film is over.

In spite of its complications, it seems obvious that Ophuls chose this way of telling the story because none of the events of Lola's life takes on its full meaning until we know how her life ended. As in *La Tendre Ennemie* and *Signora di Tutti*, Ophuls' unorthodox narrative technique is not gratuitous.

The film's many qualities were widely recognised. David Robinson wrote: "Ophuls was able to indulge his obsession for decoration to the limits of his taste. D'Eaubonne's sets and Annenkov's costumes are magnificent and are done full justice by Matras' splendid colour photography. Auric's musical score is equally glittering, and illuminates the ambivalence of the film with its own ambivalence, combining richly sentimental themes with the plangencies of the circus."

Many French critics commented on Ophuls' successful use of non-naturalistic colour and sound. Pierre Leprohon said: "It is the first intelligent use of cinemascope. He really achieves a 'poly-visual' impression when he wants to. But when he wants to return to a close-up he either masks the unwanted parts of the screen or suppresses them by using veils, hangings or panels." This is particularly impressive in the theatre scenes in Paris and Munich.

What perhaps keeps *Lola Montès* from being a complete success are the circus scenes, which are so stunning, technically and emotionally, that the flashbacks are bound to suffer by comparison. The frenetic rhythm of the circus is constantly being interrupted by the rather tiresome glimpses of the past. The scene with Lizst, in particular, seems much too long for

what it has to say. And the Bavarian sequence is dragged out with gratuitous episodes like the "thread and needle" scene. In principle the idea of alternation is good; it is just that the flashback sequences are not Ophuls' best work.

Even with this rather serious objection, *Lola Montès* is possibly Ophuls' greatest film. It is not so much that it marks a new departure for him as that it sums up all his previous work, with the greater breadth that colour, cinemascope, and a great deal of money can bring.

Biographical Note*

ON THE SIXTH of May, 1902, Max Ophuls was born in Saarbrücken, Germany. His real name was Max Oppenheimer, but when he made his acting debut in 1919, he changed it to Ophuls because of family objections to his career on the stage. In 1924 he began to direct plays, and by 1930, we are told, he had produced almost two hundred plays. In 1926 he went to Vienna to work at the Burgtheater. There he met and married (On July 12th) Hilde Wall, a well-known actress. Their son, Marcel, was born in Frankfurt the following year. Among the plays Ophuls produced during this period were: Gogol's *Inspector General*, Büchner's *Leonce and Lena*, Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* and *As You Like It*, Schnitzler's *Anatol*, and Hecht and MacArthur's *The Front Page*.

He began working in films in 1930. Nevertheless he continued producing plays until, in 1932, Ophuls and his family left Germany. During the years from 1933 to 1940 Ophuls directed films in France, Holland and Italy. Francis Koval tells us that he also accepted an invitation to Soviet Russia on condition that he would sign a 2-year contract only if he liked the country. He didn't; after two months he returned to Paris. In 1934 Ophuls opted for French national-

* Much of this information comes from Claude Beylie, *op. cit.*

lity, on the occasion of the Saar plebiscite; and in 1938 he became a naturalised French citizen.

After the fall of France he went to Switzerland, where he directed a play at the Zurich Schauspielhaus and worked for a short while on a film of Molière's *Ecole des Femmes*. Then he left for America. He arrived in Hollywood in 1941 and there he spent over four years out of work. Then Preston Sturges came across *Liebelei*, and rediscovered Ophuls. By 1949 he had made four films, and then he returned to Europe. When the project to film Balzac's *Duchesse de Langeais* fell through, he stayed on in France to make *La Ronde* and his last three films. In 1957 he went to Hamburg to direct a production of Beaumarchais' *Mariage de Figaro*. He had long suffered from a bad heart, and in February of 1957 he went into a clinic in Hamburg, where he died on March 26th. His body was cremated in Hamburg, but his ashes were buried in the Père Lachaise cemetery in Paris on April 5th, 1957.

Ophuls' career was strewn with innumerable films that were planned, scripted or announced, but were never actually begun. Among them were:

LA SCANDALE, after the play by Henri Bernstein, and with Gaby Morlay.

THE GUARDSMAN, after the play by Molnar.

MARIA TARNOWSKA, script by J. Companeez.

DERRIERE LA FACADE (the film was made later by Yves Mirande).

DUCHESSE DE LANGEAIS, with Greta Garbo and James Mason.

MAM'ZELLE NITOUCHE (the film was later made by Yves Allegret.)

LOVE OF FOUR COLONELS, after the play by Peter Ustinov.

AUTUMN, original script by Max Ophuls and Peter Ustinov. (The scripts of these last three projects were written, and are said to be among Ophuls' best.)

FAUST, after Goethe.

ARMS AND THE MAN, after Shaw.

THE BLESSING, after Nancy Mitford's novel; this is now being made by Sidney Franklin. (These last two films were to have been produced by Sir Alexander Korda.)

LE LYS DANS LA VALLEE, after Balzac.

MODIGLIANI, script by Max Ophuls and Henri Jeanson. The film was eventually made by Jacques Becker, under the title MONTPARNASSE '19.

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Opposite page: top: Magda Schneider and Wolfgang Liebeneiner in "Liebelei": centre, Louis Jourdan and Joan Fontaine in "Letter from an Unknown Woman": below, Simone Signoret and Gérard Philipe in "La Ronde".

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