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Letter from an unknown woman, Ophüls, Max, 1948

Komedie om geld (The trouble with money), Ophüls, Max, 1936

Divine, Ophüls, Max, 1935 Caught, Ophüls, Max, 1949 Le plaisir, Ophüls, Max, 1951

Madame de... (The earrings of Madame de...), Ophüls, Max, 1953

Werther, Ophüls, Max, 1938

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La signora di tutti, Ophüls, Max, 1934
The reckless moment, Ophüls, Max, 1949
La tendre ennemie (The tender enemy), Ophüls, Max, 1936
Die verliebte firma (The company's in love), Ophüls, Max, 1931
Die lachende erben (The happy heirs), Ophüls, Max, 1931
Sans lendemain, Ophüls, Max, 1939
The exile, Ophüls, Max, 1947
La ronde, Ophüls, Max, 1950

Liebelei (Flirtation), Ophüls, Max, 1933



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It's odd to imagine that Ophuls was once dismissed as a light mitteleuropean ironist, a romantic confectioner. Each of his films opened a window onto an entire world, from the ornate, monied atmosphere of 19th-century French aristocracy in Madame de... to the drab dailiness of southern California middle-class life in The Reckless Moment. Ophuls understood, perhaps better than any other filmmaker, the importance of surfaces. But he also knew that society, with its conventions and ceremonies, was nothing more than a thin membrane over a procession of hearts beating in desperate time.

Ophuls was already well-established in German theater before he began his journeyman career in movies. Like many of his fellow countrymen he was driven out of his native Germany after the Nazi takeover. During the 30s, he made films in France, Italy and Holland, and had a long, frustrating stay in the US during the 40s. But although his career was plagued with trouble and heartache, his creative output was uniformly excellent, from Die Verliebte Firma, his earliest surviving work, to the breathtaking Lola Montès, in many ways his testament and the final work in the quartet of masterpieces made before his untimely death from a heart attack at the age of 55.

A married woman throbbing with desire. A girl whose soul is transported by a careless lover. The unmistakable current of feeling that runs between a housewife and the somber man who is blackmailing her daughter. Ophuls created moments that gave form to something that was far beyond the reach of most filmmakers—the apparent permanence of feelings versus the transience of existence. This series pays tribute to a filmmaker who brought both Andrew Sarris and Pauline Kael to their knees, and who seemed to hold the fragile essence of cinema in his hands. — Kent Jones, curator, Max Ophuls Retrospective

Letter from an Unknown Woman (1948, 90m)

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In this paradigm of romantic filmmaking, Joan Fontaine's love for concert pianist Louis Jourdan blossoms when she's just a teenager, and continues to thrive through his seduction and abandonment (of her and an unborn child). Out of this familiar storyline Ophuls delivers a remarkable heroine so spiritually self-sufficient her adoration takes on a life and power that transcends its unworthy object—

Film Society of Lincoln Center

Max Ophuls







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Molly Haskell rightly calls Fontaine "a militarist of love." Another "perfect" film, according to David Thomson, who writes that "in its melolodic variations on staircases, carriages, rooms, glances, and meetings, [Letter] is about forgetfulness and the inescapable rhyming of separate times. No one had more sympathy for love than Ophuls, but no one knew so well how lovers remained unknown, strangers."

Fri June 25: 1, 5:15 & 9:15; Sat June 26: 4:30 & 8:45 Sun June 27: 2 & 6:15

The Earrings of Madame de... (1953, 105m)

As the earrings of Madame de... take a treacherous route from one owner to the next, an entire world comes to life, the world of the French aristocracy during the Belle Epoque, particularly the interior world shared by Madame de. (Danielle Darrieux), her rigid husband (Charles Boyer) and her soft, charming lover (Vittorio de Sica). Max Ophuls' masterpiece, easily one of the greatest films ever made, has all the trappings of romantic cinema, but its fluid camera takes us beyond the film's glittering surfaces ("only superficially superficial," as Boyer so aptly puts it) to the raw feelings surging beneath—and ultimately into the spiritually redemptive territory of grand passion. Darrieux, Boyer and de Sica did their greatest work in this towering film. "Perfection." — Pauline Kael. Fri June 25: 3 & 7:15; Sat June 26: 6:30; Sun June 27: 4 & 8:15

The Reckless Moment (1949, 82m)

Lucia Harper (Joan Bennett) valiantly tries to help her daughter (Geraldine Brooks) get out of a blackmailing scheme perpetrated by her slimy boyfriend (Sheppard Strudwick), before things go from very bad to absolute worst. Suddenly, a dark angel arrives in the person of James Mason's Martin Donnelly, one of the moodiest and most perfectly controlled performances of this magnificent actor's career. One of the many excellent films produced by Bennett's husband Walter Wanger, The Reckless Moment began life as a Jean Renoir project, and its story has some of the feel of his late-30s work. In what may be his most underrated film, Ophuls concentrated on the sad, oddly romantic interaction between Mason and Bennett, and offered just as controlled and moving a vision of suppressed emotion as distinguished his European work, with a pitch-perfect rendering of southern California in the bargain.

Mon June 28: 1, 5 & 9; Wed June 30: 3 & 7

La Signora di tutti (1934, 89m)

Adapted from a then-popular novel by Salvatore Gotta, La Signora di tutti (Everybody's Lady) weaves—as Andrew Sarris notes, by means of "intricate flashbacks and symbolic ellipses"—the eventful lifestory of movie star Gaby Doriot (Isa Miranda), triumphant as a performer, personally despairing. Triggered by a suicide attempt and subsequent emergency treatment, we are propelled into the actress' past history / memory to reexperience with her the (almost musical) patterns of narcissism, love and heartbreak that have brought her to the present sad state of affairs. La Signora, says Sarris, "rises to the heights of tragic self-realization so typical of the greatest Ophulsian heroines, and Miranda's Gaby Doriot is indeed one of the greatest of these tragic creatures." It certainly prefigures—in form and content—Ophuls' masterpiece Lola Montès.

Mon June 28: 3 & 7; Wed June 30: 1, 5 & 9

Tracking Eternity: MAX OPHULS' MOVING PICTURES through July 15

This program has been generously sponsored by Julien J. Studley, Inc.

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Barbara Bel Geddes and James Mason in Caught



Douglas Fairbanks Jr. as Bonnie Prince Charlie in **The Exile**, with Maria Montez (above) and Paule Croset (below)



The Bartered Bride / Die Verkaufte Braut

(Germany, 1932, 77m)

Only his second film, The Bartered Bride confirmed Ophuls as an visual artist to be reckoned with. Bride is set in a Bohemian village, in the mid-1800s, where Marie (Jarmila Novotna) is "bartered" off in marriage to pay her parents' debts. Hans, the man she really loves (Willy Domgraf-Fassbaender), promises the marriage broker not to interfere with the wedding in return for some gelt—but the story takes a happy turn into the world of the circus in the end. In this Ophulsian musical—featuring spoken dialogue interspersed with songs from Smetana's opera—money makes the world go round...not necessarily to the detriment of true love.

Thurs July 1: 1, 4:30 and 8; Sun July 4: 4 and 7:30

Happy Heirs / Die Lachenden Erben

(Germany, 1933; 75m)

A comedy of errors in which a young man must seemingly sin to find salvation, his greatest happiness and profit. Peter Frank can inherit his winemaker uncle's estate only if he refrains from drinking for a whole month...and finds a way to end longterm competion with another company. A series of accidents and surprise twists bring Peter and the lovely Gina together, and in order to prove his selfless affection, the prospective heir imbibes the forbidden wine. But, as is often true in Ophuls' world, breaking socio-economic rules may not mark the end of the world—but rather the winning of a new one.

Thurs July 1: 2:45 and 6:15; Sun July 4: 5:45

Caught

(USA, 1949; 88m)

Variously dubbed a woman's film and a film noir, Caught is an extraordinarily intense examination of a love triangle involving a blonde "nice girl" who dreams of bettering herself (Barbara Bel Geddes); a destructively neurotic, charismatic millionaire (Robert Ryan); and a good doctor with his feet firmly planted on the ground (James Mason). Kin to Madame de's husband (Charles Boyer), Ryan's Smith Ohlrig is a dark coil of complexity. Abusive and neglectful of the woman he truly adores, but mistakes as just another gold-digger, this demon lover's passions run very deep. Ophuls designs each frame and camera movement to express existential / emotional / economic traps and revivifying kinesis. Photographed in strongly contrasting light and shadow by the legendary Lee Garmes.

Fri July 2: 1 and 6:15; Sat July 3: 4 and 8

The Exile

(USA, 1947, 92m)

The Exile is the one swashbuckler in the history of that robust genre that demands to be called exquisite. Or Dutch: it's a fictional account of Prince Charles Stuart hiding out in Holland, evading pesky Roundhead spies and genteelly romancing a lovely innkeeper (Paule Croset/Paula Corday) while waiting to be restored to the English throne. Douglas Fairbanks Jr., who wrote



Liebelei



From Mayerling to Sarajevo (above)

Simone Signoret in Le Plaisir (below)



the script and produced as well as giving a droll stellar performance, set the capstone on his enterprise by hiring Ophuls (restyled Opuls for U.S. consumption) to direct. The results are variously delicate, cosmopolitan, and finally ecstatic as Max and Doug have a field day staging an epic swordfight up and down sundry windmills. With Henry Daniell a superb Cromwellian death's-head, plus Nigel Bruce, Robert Coote, and oh yes, Maria Montez!

Fri July 2: 3 and 8:15; Sat July 3: 6

Flirtation / Liebelei

(Germany, 1932; 88m)

In turn-of-the-century Vienna, a young officer (Wolfgang Liebeneiner) and the daughter of a violinist (Magda Schneider) fall in love and seem to be destined for happiness. Then, a duel over a married woman puts the lovers in jeopardy. Adapted from the play by Arthur Schnitzler, Ophuls' last German film before exile, Liebelei is a romantic excursion into desire's unexpected detours. The young director's first success shows that, from the start, he reveled in the way music and the moving camera could celebrate the birth and demise of love. (Ophuls' memorable star was Romy Schneider's mother.)

Mon July 5: 1 and 5:15; Tues July 6: 1

From Mayerling to Sarajevo / De Mayerling à Sarajevo

(France, 1940; 89 minutes)

"One of the finest and most misunderstood of all Ophuls' films," according to Robin Wood, Sarajevo was the last film the director completed in France before fleeing the Nazis to America (and Hollywood). A sumptuous historical drama shot with the extravagant style of his later work, the film is set in the corrupt Austro-Hungarian court, and chronicles the love affair of Countess Sophie and Archduke Ferdinand as they are swept up in the events that led to the First World War. Ophuls luxuriates in the suffocating elegance of court life and characteristically is more interested in the plight of the countess than in the impending doom of the heir apparent. "Finds him relishing the sort of thing he did best—casting an ironic eye on the aristocracy and portraying a bitter-sweet romance against a background of operas, balls, and rides through the woods" (Bloomsbury Foreign Film Guide).

with

Valse Brillante de Chopin (France, 1936; 6m): Ophuls echoed his compositions of pianist Alexander Brailowsky in this performance short whenever Stefan (Louis Jourdan) played piano in Letter to an Unknown Woman a decade later.

Ave Maria di Schubert (France, 1936; 5m): Ophuls' second contribution to a series entitled "Music and Cinema," which included works by a number of well-known directors. Ophuls' shorts were photographed by Franz Planer.

Mon July 5: 3 and 7:15; Tues July 6: 3

Max Ophuls' Moving Pictures



Danielle Damieux in Le Plaisir

Anton Walbrook and Simone Signoret in La Ronde (below)





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Le Plaisi

(France, 1951; 95m)

Featuring a dream cast—including Claude Dauphin, Danielle Darrieux, Jean Gabin, Pierre Brasseur, Simone Simon, Daniel Gélin, Jean Servais, Gaby Morland, Pierre Brasseur, Madeleine Renaud and Peter Ustinov—Le Plaisir renders into exquisite Ophulsian cinema three stories by Guy de Maupassant. In the first, "Le Masque," an old man temporarily regains his youth by wearing a magic mask to a ball. In the second, "La Maison Telier," a group of prostitutes embark on an annual country holiday. In the last, a painter who makes his models his mistresses is forced to marry one (Simone Simon) after she cripples herself in a suicide attempt. Each tale is an exhilarating dance, alternating movement and stasis, light and shadow, pleasure and pain.

Wed July 7: 1 and 5; Thurs July 8: 3 and 7; Fri July 9: 5

The Trouble with Money / Komedie om geld (Netherlands, 1936; 88m)

Ophuls' only Dutch film follows the extremely complex adventures of a bank clerk named Brand who loses and ultimately rediscovers a large deposit. An original story, Komedie is the director's most "Brechtian" film in its use of a master of ceremonies or directorial alter ego who tells the tale of money that moves the world: "Money which is mute, which straightens what's bent, which is worshipped, which he desired until it taught him to despise it...." It's not a great stretch to see Komedie's currency as an early version of The Earrings of Madame de....

Wed July 7: 3; Thurs July 8: 5; Fri July 9: 1

La Ronde

(France, 1950, 97m)

Even those unfamiliar with Ophuls' oeuvre know this much-imitated film, adapted from another Schnitzler play and initially banned from the USA due to its alleged "immorality." Comprised of a "roundelay" of brief affairs, La Ronde is a carnal carousel ride—visually and thematically---"turned" (narrated) by puppetmaster Anton Walbrook. In 19th-century Vienna, a young prostitute (the glorious Simone Signoret) momentarily loves a soldier (Serge Reggiani), who then takes up with a little maid (kittenish Simone) Simon, post-Cat People). The merry-go-round continues to whirl, with one partner from the pairings always continuing into the next liaison, until the movement ends where it began. If Schnitzler meant to cast a mordant gaze on sexual shallowness, Ophuls recognizes both the power and evanescence of desire. The cast could not be improved upon: Danièlle Darrieux, Daniel Gélin, Odette Joyeux, Jean-Louis Barrault, Isa Miranda and Gérard Philipe. Wed July 7: 7; Thurs July 8: 1 and 9; Fri July 9: 3 and 7

Lola Montès

(France/Germany, 1955; 140m)

When this masterpiece opened, police had to be called to put down riots, so confused and enraged were those who first watched it. In 1963, Andrew Sarris dubbed Lola the greatest film ever made—and it's surely an arguable position! Ophuls' exhilaratingly



*Base MSRP includes destination. Tax and options extra.







of legendary courtesan Lola Montès (Martine Carol) Long after her larger than-lite romances with aging King Ludwig (Anton Walbrook) Liszt and a handsome young student (Oskar Werner). Montès is reduced to a circus display, with ringmaster Peter Ustinov acting as a director who both exploits and adores his "muse." The tahula rasa of Martines mannequin-like face and the turntable vignettes of her rich past are the stuff from which movie magic is somehow unreeled. In the inexorable circularity of Ophuls mise-en-scène lies both the tragedy and transcendence of human existence: he makes you believe that art and style make timebound mortality matter. One of the great examples of the French cinemas provocative bent for identifying Woman with Film.

Sat July 10: 4 and 8:15; Sun July 11: 4 and 8:15

No Tomorrow / Sans lendemain

(France, 1939; 82m)

A variation on Ophuls' film noir The Reckless Moment (1949), No Tomorrow is the story of a once-respectable woman who reencounters her first love, now a successful doctor. Reduced to nude-dancing in a sleazy dive, with a son to support, Evelyne (Edwige Feuillère) borrows money at an outrageous interest rate in order to create a facade of respectability—and, it goes without saying, Georges falls in love with her all over again. But how can Evelyne maintain her bourgeois value and save son and "father" from the consequences of her fall?

Sat July 10: 6:15; Sun July 11: 6:15

Yoshiwara

(France, 1937; 88m)

Just before the Sino-Japanese War, the beautiful aristocrat Kohana (Michiko Tanaka) is brought low into geishahood by her parents bankruptcy and suicide. A coolie who is also a painter (matinee idol Sessue Hayakawa) falls deeply in love with the innocent girl as he transports her to her new home in a brothel. Eventually wooed and symbolically wedded by a Russian naval officer (Pierre-Richard Willm), Kohana remains the heart's desire of her coolie. An Ophulsian Madame Butterfly with moments that anticipate Letter from an Unknown Woman.

Mon July 12: 1 and 9

Werther

(France, 1938; 85m)

From Goethe's Sorrows of Young Werther, Ophuls' version moves from the 18th to the 19th century, and transforms the dramatic tale of a doomed young man's loss of his true love (Annie Vernay) to a friend (Jean Galland) into a romantic tragedy that focusses—in typically Ophulsian style—on the sorrows of the woman the poet Werther (Pierre-Richard Willm) cannot seduce away from her strait-laced judge-fiancé. In Charlotte's paternalistic society—as in that of Madame de...— "there are always limits to passion."

Mon July 12: 3 and 7; Tues July 13: 3





Divine

(Erance=1935, 82m)

Colette collaborated on Divine's script, in which a country girl (Simone Berriau) finds work as a chorus girl in Paris, gets embroiled with a bad egg, and then finds true love with a good-looking milkman. Ophuls works the classic city/country opposition here, but the balance between wicked urban allure and rural authenticity is a bit lopsided due to the director's visual delight in the excitement of music hall life. Ophuls called it "my biggest flop", Truffaut labeled it "a little masterpiece."

Mon July 12: 5; Tues July 13: 1

The Company in Love / Die Verliebte Firma

(Germany, 1931; 65m)

In this "musical," a cartel of businessmen decide to kidnap a youthful competitor (Fernand Fabre), using a lovely woman to handle the abduction. Trouble is, Annette (Lili Damita) begins to find herself falling in love with the handsome young banker.

Wed July 14: 1, 4:30 and 7:45; Thurs July 15: 2:30

The Tender Enemy / La Tendre ennemie

(France, 1936; 69m)

This rarely seen comic fantasy is set in Ophulsian motion by a mother's thwarting of her daughter's elopement with the man she loves. The girl (Simone Berriau) is then buried in a marriage made for financial security. When her daughter (Jacqueline Daix) grows up, it looks as though she will be the third generation to opt for money over love. But the spirits of three men who died—in one way or another—for love of her mother, their "tender enemy," make a trip back to earth in the nick of time, to warn her off such a sad destiny by showing her, in flashback, her trapped mother's experiences and to introduce her to "the right man." Ophuls adapted this lovely roundelay of mothers, lovers, and "ectoplasms" from a rather nasty play by André-Paul Antoine. "Funny, stylish, cynical, The Tender Enemy has a certain downscale strangeness—the ghosts are wrapped in cellophane, and the flashbacks are staged against spare, stylized sets floating in washes of dappled light." — Magill's Survey of Cinema Wed July 14: 2:45 and 6; Thurs July 15: 1 and 4

