

## Document Citation

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Our daily bread, Vidor, King, 1934  
Not so dumb, Vidor, King, 1930  
Love never dies, Vidor, King, 1921  
The jack-knife man, Vidor, King, 1920  
Cynara, Vidor, King, 1932  
Comrade X, Vidor, King, 1940  
The citadel, Vidor, King, 1938  
Hallelujah, Vidor, King, 1929  
The champ, Vidor, King, 1931  
Bird of paradise, Vidor, King, 1932  
Billy the Kid, Vidor, King, 1930  
Wild oranges, Vidor, King, 1924

urban despair stars some of the finest actors of the thirties—Sylvia Sidney, Beulah Bondi, Estelle Taylor and John Qualen.

In 1930 Vidor directed his second western, a story of the infamous outlaw. In order to make the film, Vidor and Laurence Stallings, his writer on *The Big Parade*, had to persuade Irving Thalberg, M-G-M production chief, that the motion picture public was ready for "honest brutality." The cast included Johnny Mack Brown as Billy and Wallace Beery as Sheriff Pat Garrett.

### Love Never Dies (1921) and The Patsy (1928)

**Friday, June 4 at 8:30.** *Love Never Dies*, the only Vidor film produced by Thomas Ince, was thought to be lost until quite recently. In cooperation with UCLA, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art has now made a print from the original negative, restoring the tints and tones. The Vidor retrospective will mark the first time that the film has been shown since its initial release. This fascinating and complex love story, unfortunately missing a few sequences, centers around a young couple separated by mere chance and coincidence.

Vidor's first film with Marion Davies freed her from the cumbersome dramatic roles which she had previously been assigned and gave her the opportunity to be herself. As a guest at San Simeon, Vidor had observed Miss Davies' imitations and comic antics, so he cast her as a 1920's Cinderella, a clumsy teenager who falls in love with her older sister's boyfriend. Marion Davies in *The Patsy* must not be confused with the pathetic opera singer in *Citizen Kane*—an error which has greatly maligned her talents as a comedienne. Under Vidor's direction, she gives a stunning, hilarious performance. Marie Dressler and Dell Henderson play her mother and father.

### H. M. Pulham, Esq. (1941) and clips from Vidor's western films

**Saturday, June 5 at 8:30.** *H. M. Pulham, Esq.* stars Robert Young in the role of a Boston Businessman who looks back on his life of the past quarter-century as one cast in a mold from which he longed to escape. Young's performance shows vitality and compassion, and Hedy Lamarr, as the secret love of his life, is sophisticated, serious and mature.

*Also:* selected sequences from Vidor's western films will be shown last on this program.

### La Boheme (1926) and Bird of Paradise (1932)

**Friday, June 11 at 8:30.** For *La Boheme*, her first picture at Metro, Lillian Gish requested the cast and director of *The Big Parade*. Based on the story from which the opera was also taken, *La Boheme* is neither a complex nor an important work; yet, the transcendent beauty of Lillian Gish, never more beautifully photographed, and her total involvement in her role, give the film enduring power and mystery.

*Bird of Paradise*, the first Vidor film produced by David O. Selznick at RKO, called for a Hawaiian romance starring Dolores Del Rio and Joel McCrae. Although South Seas exoticism was never Vidor's forte, he was able to turn an unlikely, unwieldy play into a simple and erotic love story.

### The Big Parade (1925) and sequence from The Sky Pilot (1920)

**Saturday, June 12 at 8:30.** *The Big Parade*, one of the classics of American cinema, shows John Gilbert as a wealthy young man who joins the Army and goes off to World War I, simply because everyone else does. Renee Adoree is the young peasant girl whom he meets in France, and Karl Dane and Tom O'Brien are his fox-hole buddies. The lightness and surprise of the many improvisations set against inexorable troop movements and the

"march of death" suggest that human kindness, imagination, and generosity are inevitably dwarfed by the war machine.

Colleen Moore's fresh beauty and charm animate this sequence from *The Sky Pilot*, made more than 50 years ago.

During the recent *Tribute to Mark Pickford*, many people discovered anew the unique talent of Chauncey Haines whose organ scores added so much to our presentations. We are pleased to announce that Mr. Haines will again be at the organ for all of the silent Vidor films, those made before 1929.

### Ticket Information

Tickets may be obtained at the Ticket Desk in the Leo S. Bing Center Tuesday through Friday, 11:00-4:00, and one hour prior to performances. Or you may send your check together with a stamped, self-addressed envelope to: Ticket Desk, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 5905 Wilshire Boulevard, Los Angeles 90036. Orders received too late to be returned before show time will be held for pick-up at the door.

Tickets are \$2.00 for the general public, \$1.50 for Members. Student tickets are \$1.50 and are available only upon presentation of student identification.

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King Vidor on the set of *Street Scene* (1931)



## The Films of King Vidor

During the month of May, the County Museum will present a retrospective of the films of King Vidor. Vidor is one of the most influential and yet most overlooked of American directors. Although his work has long been hailed in Europe, especially in Russia and in France, his career has yet to be given a proper critical review in America where he is known for his individual pictures rather than for his work as a whole. Unfortunately, many of Vidor's finest films have lain dormant in vaults for years and have been made available only in recent months. Although the Museum will offer a selection spanning his entire career, special attention will be given to these new "discoveries." Thus, this retrospective will bring into focus the remarkable work of an outstanding American director.

King Vidor was born in Galveston, Texas shortly before the turn of the century. If he had followed his father's advice and abandoned his fascination with the motion picture camera to join the family lumber business, he would still have been an important American motion picture pioneer. As a boy, he was the first cameraman in the Galveston-Houston area, sharing the only motion picture camera in both cities with a certain John Boggs, the chauffeur to a wealthy Houston family. Working with the most primitive conditions and equipment, Vidor quickly became a newsreel cameraman—the Southwest representative of the Mutual Weekly Company. For sixty cents per usable foot of film, he recorded the big events—storms, elections, disasters and local happenings of national interest. His first job was to shoot a massive movement of troops from Galveston to Houston. At seventeen, in cooperation with a local newspaper, he established a newsreel outfit in Houston, where he shot, processed and edited his own material. This early total involvement and experience in motion picture production never left him; he is as much at home with the technical side of film-making as he is with the aesthetic, as much a craftsman as an *auteur*.

The romance and wonder of being the only cameraman in Southeast Texas was soon superseded by a desire to, in Vidor's words, "go where the action was"—Los An-

geles. He bought a Ford, and, with his young bride Florence Vidor, who wanted to be a great actress as much as Vidor yearned to become a great director, he set out for Hollywood. To support himself along the way, he shot film for the Ford Motor Company—travelogue footage of the Vidor Model T inching across the Southwest. Broke and jobless, they arrived in Hollywood. It was 1915 and Vidor was twenty years old.

He soon found work, not as a director or a cameraman but as an extra. The young couple rented a room near D. W. Griffith's *Intolerance* set where Vidor would spend hours watching the great man direct. In 1919, after several years of working as an extra, a production assistant, and director of two-reelers, he made his first feature length film, *The Turn in The Road*. As evidence of Vidor's characteristic ability to get along with anyone, it was a Christian Science film backed by a group of nine doctors. The picture was a popular success, and King Vidor's career as a feature film director had begun.

Unlike many other American directors of his rank, Vidor has always tried to avoid making the same film twice. His work encompasses an amazing variety of subject matter (westerns—*Duel in the Sun*, *Ruby Gentry*, *Billy The Kid*; urban dramas—*Street Scene*, *Happiness*, *The Champ*, *The Crowd*; light elegant comedies—*The Patsy*, *Show People*; elaborate spectacles—*Duel in the Sun*, *War and Peace*, *The Big Parade*) as well as photographic style and lighting (from the deliberate clarity and open-air freshness of *Show People* and *The Patsy* to the oppressive shadows and darkness of *Street Scene* and *Hallelujah* and the stifling three-strip landscapes of *Duel in the Sun*.)

The variety in Vidor's work has not been limited to story or technique; he has exacted marvelous performances from the most widely differing "types" of actors and actresses. Whereas Lubitsch, Griffith and Chaplin would demonstrate, act out, scenes

for their players, Vidor's method of direction never included *showing* an actor *how* to play it. He would depend more on a friendship, a personal rapport, than on an autocratic or paternalistic relationship. With John Gilbert, the star of *The Big Parade* and of several other Vidor M-G-M films, he established what he refers to as a "short-hand system" (Gilbert called it "mental telephthy"). Vidor could direct a Gilbert scene with no more than a word or a gesture of the hand.

In directing stars or unknowns, actors or non-actors, Vidor seems to have realized that beauty is what is natural in a human being. In his best films, there is always a certain "documentary" flavor: the performances seem to go beyond acting. Vidor himself speaks with warmth of the great "fun" he had in making many of these pictures. The friendship and trust he shared with his actors and actresses is evident in the response they give him when the camera begins to roll.

If, indeed, there is a Vidor style, it is characteristically modest and self-effacing. King Vidor has never been a flamboyant director; he has a marked aversion to glamour and ostentatious wealth. He needles pomposity and social pretentiousness, but cruelty and sarcasm are not part of his repertoire. His greatest films and his greatest concerns have been for the simple man and the simple woman. He respects the honesty and straightforwardness of his heroes and heroines. He has never lambasted naive or ingenuousness, only hypocrisy and duplicity. He favors natural settings to sound stages; the artificial, whether in make-up, costumes, censorship or actors, has always made him uncomfortable and constrained.

The richness and beauty of the films of King Vidor are more than a great man's vision of his times; they offer also a startling panorama of twentieth century America. The dignity, grace and honor which he has given to his characters and his stories are perhaps more than a history of this century deserves.

—Nancy Dowd

## Show People (1928) and Selected Clips

**Friday, May 7 at 8:30.** A wonderfully funny satire on Hollywood studio life in the twenties, *Show People* was King Vidor's second film with Marion Davies. As a penniless Southern belle who comes to Hollywood thinking stardom is just around the corner, Miss Davies proves once more that she is a superb comedienne. *Show People* seems as much a documentary on movie comedians as it is an elegant farce. Shot at the M-G-M and Mack Sennett Studios, the cast includes Charles Chaplin, John Gilbert, Douglas Fairbanks and King Vidor—all playing themselves. (Personally introduced by Mr. Vidor)

Note: *Personal appearances and introductory remarks by leading film personalities are being scheduled for many of the programs in this series. Most of these cannot be announced in advance, owing to busy schedules and unforeseen professional developments.*

## Jack Knife Man (1920) and The Champ (1931)

**Saturday, May 8 at 8:30.** Vidor's earliest existing feature length film is a warm, sentimental story of an old man and an orphan boy which gives evidence of his early penchant for unknown actors and his ability to make the life of a quiet, simple man interesting. Florence Vidor, the director's first wife and the only established star in the cast, makes a brief appearance.

Wallace Beery as a drunken ex-champion down on his luck and Jackie Cooper as his devoted son and sidekick star in *The Champ*, "a heartwarming story" of a boxer trying to make a comeback. Jackie Cooper gives an extraordinary performance as a tough, swaggering city kid who takes care of himself and his father. An enormously popular film when it was first released, *The Champ* has lost none of its charm or its thirties' mixture of toughness and "heart."

## Wild Oranges (1924) and The Citadel (1938)

**Friday, May 14 at 8:30.** *Wild Oranges* is an unusual and important Vidor film which has not been shown since its original release. Vidor persuaded Goldwyn officials to let him shoot this strange Gothic love story on location in the Florida swamps with a small cast. It tells of a young man trying to escape from the past and a young woman trapped by her fear of the present.

In 1938, Vidor directed his first sound film outside the United States. Based on A. J. Cronin's novel, *The Citadel*, and filmed in Great Britain, it has been seen but rarely in this country. Hailed as one of Vidor's best sound films, the cast includes several of Britain's most distinguished actors: Robert Donat, Sir Ralph Richardson, Rex Harrison, and Emyln Williams.

## The Crowd (1928) and clips from Cynara and Stella Dallas

**Saturday, May 15 at 8:30.** As in all his most personal works, the hero of *The Crowd* is a simple man, one of the crowd, struggling to maintain his hopes against the mass and routine which threaten to swallow him. Although rarely seen in this country, *The Crowd* is one of the most important films of the silent era. The maturity, generosity, and beauty which Vidor brings to this story of the life of an "average American couple," played by James Murray and Eleanor Boardman, are rare in a cinema which has tended to satirize or ignore its average people.

An engaging excerpt from *Cynara* shows Ronald Colman in a long forgotten 1932 movie,

while Barbara Stanwyck is shown to excellent advantage in a sequence from the classic soap opera, *Stella Dallas*.

## Not So Dumb (1930) and Comrade "X" (1940)

**Friday, May 21 at 8:30.** *Not So Dumb* features Marion Davies in her first "talking" comedy. In this outrageous satire on middle-class proper behavior, Miss Davies plays Dulcy, the hapless hostess who does everything wrong. Donald Ogden Stewart, the well-known screenwriter, gives an hilarious performance in his first motion picture role.

A pleasant minor comedy, *Comrade X* enjoyed excellent popular success when it was released late in 1940. Critics were not entirely friendly to this film, perhaps because it followed the elegant *Ninotchka* and was inappropriately compared to the Lubitsch film. But Clark Gable and Hedy Lamarr were effectively paired in a spoof of the Kremlin which the general public enjoyed and found highly entertaining.

## Happiness (1924) and Northwest Passage (1940)

**Saturday, May 22 at 8:30.** *Happiness* featured Laurette Taylor in her second motion picture role. In 1923 Vidor began what would prove to be a long and happy career at Metro with the difficult task of directing the great stage actress in her forties at the time, as the very young heroine of *Peg O' My Heart*. He devised an ingenious lighting system which erased the years from her face and, even more remarkably, managed to give her the confidence to make the difficult transition from stage to screen. Miss Taylor was so impressed with the results that she requested Vidor as her director in *Happiness*. In some respects, such as the staging of the epic battle sequences, *Northwest Passage* can be compared with *The Big Parade* and judged superior. This time, however, it's the French and Indian War in pre-revolutionary America, with Spencer Tracy and Robert Young leading an attack against an Indian settlement (filmed in Technicolor). For excitement, realism and epic scope, *Northwest Passage* remains a distinguished production.

## Hallelujah (1929) and Our Daily Bread (1934)

**Friday, May 28 at 8:30.** *Hallelujah*, the director's first sound film, is a landmark both in his career and in motion picture history. Using an all black cast, none of whom had ever acted in motion pictures before, Vidor wrote and directed this beautiful pastoral symphony of a Tennessee family. Although many directors were constrained and confused by the coming of sound, Vidor understood that sound did not necessarily mean words. The magnificent scenes of the river baptism and the "shouting" are documentaries of a bygone era, but the sense of the people, the feeling of life that one takes from *Hallelujah* are as immediate now as they were in 1929.

The second part of Vidor's War (*The Big Parade*), Wheat and Steel (*American Romance*) trilogy, *Our Daily Bread* is the story of a young couple who attempt to cope with the exigencies of life in the Depression by setting up a communal farm. In an era known more for its escapist musical extravaganzas and sophisticated comedies, *Our Daily Bread* is an honest, personal attempt to confront an existing situation.

## Street Scene (1931) and Billy the Kid (1930)

**Saturday, May 29 at 8:30.** In *Street Scene*, one of Vidor's greatest films, the director was able to take a stage play and expand it into a symphony of city life. By combining elaborate travelling shots, a musical score by Alfred Newmann and the cast of the original New York play, Vidor turns one street into a universe. This dark and fatalistic portrayal of