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3 FROM THE ARCHIVES

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Nosferatu, Eine Symphonie des Grauens

Nosferatu, A Symphony of Terror



GERMANY 1921

“A chilling draught from the world beyond,” in Béla Balázs’s phrase, blows through *Nosferatu*, far colder than anything in the many subsequent versions of the Dracula story, for all their greater sophistication. In the whole span of horror movies, perhaps only Dreyer’s *Vampyr* matches it for sheer unearthliness. ...

Most German horror films of the period, following *Caligari*, were claustrophobic, studio-bound, filled with heavy shadows and distorted expressionist sets. Murnau rejected this convention; much of *Nosferatu* was filmed on location, in rugged mountain landscapes and on quiet northern streets. And these authentic surroundings, far from rendering the horror prosaic, seem themselves to be infected by *Nosferatu*’s monstrous presence... The *Nosferatu* of Max Schreck is unforgettably grotesque from his first manifestation – no hint of the superficial urbanity of Lugosi or Christopher Lee. Tall, cadaverously thin, bald, bat-eared, rabbit-toothed, he moves with short jerky steps, taloned hands close to his sides, as though permanently confined by the shape of his diurnal coffin. The effect is near-ludicrous, chilling, and ultimately even pitiful... Beside him, the other characters fade to insignificance...

Nosferatu was made on a modest budget for the small Prana company, one reason perhaps for the sparing use of trick effects... Two brief episodes of stop-action cause figures to move with a deranged clockwork rapidity. But generally Murnau relies on subtly off-centre framings and disorienting camera angles to convey the insidious menace of his vision, often focusing on some small, allusive detail... – Philip Kemp, *FW Murnau*, in *World Film Directors, vol. I, 1890-1945* (1987)

Nosferatu is the greatest movie ever made on the Dracula theme. – Francis Ford Coppola

◆ **FW MURNAU** Born 28 December 1888, Bielefeld, Germany, as Friedrich Wilhelm Plumpe. After studies at Heidelberg University, he went to Berlin to work – first as an actor, then as an assistant director – for Max Reinhardt. He spent most of World War I in Switzerland, where he directed a play and helped prepare propaganda films for the German embassy in Berne. In 1919 he returned to Germany to begin his career as a film director. He quickly established himself as one of the great visual stylists of the cinema with such classic films as *Nosferatu*, *The Last Laugh*, and *Faust*. The international success of *The Last Laugh* brought him to Hollywood in 1927, where he was given carte blanche at Fox to direct another masterpiece, *Sunrise*. He died in a car crash in California on 11 March 1931, a week before the premiere of his last film, *Tabu* (co-directed with documentarist Robert Flaherty).



◆ CREDITS

Dir: FW Murnau. Prod: Albin Grau, Enrico Dieckmann. Scr: Henrik Galeen, based on the novel *Dracula* by Bram Stoker. Phot: Fritz Arno Wagner. Asst. phot: Günther Krampf. Prod. des/Cost. des: Albin Grau. Orig. score: Hans Erdmann. rt: 94 mins. Lang: German intertitles. Prod. co: Prana-Film (Berlin).

◆ CAST

Max Schreck (Count Orlok – *Nosferatu*), Gustav von Wangenheim (Hutter), Greta Schröder (Ellen), Georg Heinrich Schnell (Harding), Alexander Granach (Knock), Max Nemetz (Captain), John Gottowt (Professor Bulwer), Gustav Botz

(Professor Sievers), Wolfgang Heinz (sailor). Restoration by La Cineteca del Comune di Bologna and the Münchner Stadtmuseum/Filmmuseum, with the collaboration of the Cinemateca Portuguesa and La Cinémathèque Française, funded by LUMIERE.

◆ FILMOGRAPHY (selected):

1919 *Der Knabe in Blau* (The Child in Blue)
1920 *Satanas*
Sehnsucht (Longing)
Der Januskopf
1921 *Schloss Vogelöd* (The Haunted Castle)
1922 *Nosferatu, Eine Symphonie des Grauens*

Der brennende Acker (The Burning Acre)
Phantom
1924 *Die Finanzen des Grossherzogs* (The Finances of the Grand Duke)
Der letzte Mann (The Last Laugh)
1925 *Tartüff* (Tartuffe)
1926 *Faust*
1927 *Sunrise – A Song of Two Humans*
1928 *Four Devils*
1930 *City Girl*
Die zwölfte Stunde: Eine Nacht des Grauens (sd. version of *Nosferatu*)
1931 *Tabu* (co-dir)