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LOUISE BROOKS IN PANDORA'S BOX

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 5

7:30 PM

PANDORA'S BOX

(Germany, 1928)

DIRECTED BY G. W. PABST. PRODUCED BY GEORGE C. HORSETZSKY FOR NERO FILM. SCREENPLAY BY LADISLAUS VAJDA FROM TWO PLAYS BY FRANK WEDEKIND, "ERDGEIST" AND "DIE BUCHSE DER PANDORA." PHOTOGRAPHED BY GUNTHER KRAMPF. ART DIRECTION BY ANDREI ANDREIEV. WITH LOUISE BROOKS (LULU), FRITZ KORTNER (DR. PETER SCHON), FRANZ LEDERER (ALWA SCHON), AND GUSTAV DIESSL (JACK THE RIPPER). 120 MINUTES. SILENT (24 FPS) 35mm.

PANDORA'S BOX is loosely adapted from two Wedekind plays comprising the "Lulu" tragedy. The story deals with a woman who burns everyone who comes under her spell, but who falls victim, as a Soho prostitute, to Jack the Ripper. Under Pabst's direction, the film is a masterpiece of atmosphere, camera movement, and editing: it is also one of the most sexually charged films ever made, largely due to the incendiary performance of American actress Louise Brooks, whose profound talents were discovered by Pabst, and whose genius has always been legendary in Europe. Writing of "The Miracle of Louise Brooks," German historian Lotte Eisner notes:

Louise Brooks, always enigmatically impassive, overwhelmingly exists throughout these two films. We know that Louise Brooks is a remarkable actress endowed with uncommon intelligence, and not merely a dazzlingly beautiful woman.

PANDORA'S BOX is a silent film. As such it does very well without the words which Wedekind deemed indispensable to bring out the erotic power of this singular 'earthly being' endowed with animal beauty, but lacking all moral sense, and doing evil unconsciously....

Nobody has ever equalled Pabst's portrayal of the back-stage fever on the opening night of a big show, the hurrying and scurrying during the scene changes, the stage seen from the wings as the performers go on and off and bound forward to acknowledge their applause at the end of their act, the rivalry, complacency, and humour, the bewildering bustle of stage hands and electricians—a stupendous whirl of artistic aspirations, colourful detail, and a facile eroticism. Even the famous 42ND STREET does not get across this dazzle and warmth, this sensuality swamped in the light shimmering on the lame curtains and the helmets and suits of armor, and silvering the bodies of the all-but-naked women. Pabst directs all this

turmoil with remarkable dexterity; everything has been worked out in advance; at precisely calculated intervals a few figures cross in front of or behind a main group, giving an impression of effervescence and dynamism. Lulu appears like some pagan idol, tempting, glittering with spangles, feathers, and frills, against a wavering out-of-focus background.

The screenplay for PANDORA'S BOX has been published in paperback by Simon and Schuster, and contains a fascinating article on "Pabst and Lulu" by Louise Brooks, written in 1965.

Interview from The Eastman House