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## MAX OPHULS: MOVING PICTURES

**Rarely Screened Classics by a Master of Visual Poetry at the Castro Theatre**

**San Francisco** – To kick off its calendar of fall film events the San Francisco Film Society will present **MAX OPHULS: MOVING PICTURES**, twelve films by the master visual stylist Max Ophuls, October 1-7 at the Castro Theatre.

Max Ophuls (1902-1957) began his career as an actor, but soon gravitated to directing. His earliest work was produced in his native Germany, but the Jewish Ophuls left his homeland in the mid-thirties, and spent several years making films in France, Italy and Holland before settling in Hollywood in 1941. At the top of his form he returned to France in the 1950s and created his final masterpieces. **MAX OPHULS: MOVING PICTURES** includes films from each of these countries and spans his career from 1932 to 1955. Ophuls was a virtuoso of the directing style that emphasizes mise-en-scène and sequence shots. His camera was incredibly fluid, constantly moving in an intoxicating array of tracking shots, crane shots, tilts and pans, and sensuously caressing the luxurious baroque texture of the timeless world in which his romantic characters moved. "He gave camera movement its finest hours in the history of the cinema," wrote Andrew Sarris. In announcing the series Peter Scarlet, Artistic Director of the Film Society, remarked that "Few films reward repeated viewings as much as those of the great Max Ophuls. How sad that few decent copies of any of them are available any longer in the US – and sadder still that a number of them were never subtitled or released in this country at all. But what great news that thanks to Pacific Film Archive's heroic efforts, a near-complete retrospective of these extraordinary films has finally been assembled. We're especially grateful that we'll be able to present the highlights of this series at the Castro the first week in October. These dozen titles are not to be missed."

### Friday, October 1

**7:30 LA SIGNORA DI TUTTI** (*Everybody's Lady*) Italy, 1934, 89 min., in Italian with English subtitles

By means of intricate flashbacks and symbolic ellipses Ophuls weaves the eventful life story of a movie star, Gaby Doriot (Isa Miranda), triumphant as a performer, personally despairing. A suicide attempt and subsequent emergency treatment propel her to re-experience the (almost musical) patterns of narcissism, love and heartbreak that have brought her to the present sad state of affairs. (*Kathleen Murphy*) Print source British Film Institute; courtesy Mediaset, Rome.

**9:30 THE EARRINGS OF MADAME DE...** (*Madame de...*) France/Italy, 1953, 105 min., in French with English subtitles

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). 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 surface to the raw feelings surging beneath. (*Kent Jones*) Print source British Film Institute; permission Télédís, Paris.

### Saturday, October 2

**2:00, 7:00 LETTER FROM AN UNKNOWN WOMAN** USA, 1948, 90 min.

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. (*Kathleen Murphy*) Print source UCLA Film and Television Archive; permission Paramount Pictures and Kit Parker Films.



**4:30, 9:00 LOLA MONTES** France, 1955, 110 min., in French with English subtitles

When this masterpiece opened, police had to be called to put down riots, so confused and enraged were those who first watched it. Ophüls' exhilaratingly composed screen – in color and CinemaScope – magnifies the story of legendary courtesan Lola Montès (Martine Carol). Long after her larger-than-life romances with Franz Liszt, the aging King Ludwig of Bavaria (Anton Walbrook) and a handsome young student (Oskar Werner), Lola is reduced to a circus display, with ringmaster Peter Ustinov acting as a director who both exploits and adores his “muse.” (*Kathleen Murphy*) Print source Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Paris; permission Les Films du jeudi, Paris.

**Sunday, October 3****1:00, 5:00, 9:00 LE PLAISIR (*Pleasure*)** France, 1952, 95 min., in French with English subtitles

Featuring a dream cast – including Danielle Darrieux, Jean Gabin, Madeleine Renaud and Simone Simon – **LE PLAISIR** renders into exquisite Ophülsian cinema three stories by Guy de Maupassant. In the first, “The Mask,” an old man temporarily regains his youth by wearing a magic mask to a ball. In the second, “The Tellier House,” a group of prostitutes embarks on an annual country holiday. In the last, “The Model,” a painter who makes his models his mistresses is forced to marry one after she cripples herself in a suicide attempt. Each tale is an exhilarating dance alternating movement and stasis, light and shadow, pleasure and pain. (*Kathleen Murphy*) Print source Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Paris.

**3:00, 7:00 LA RONDE** France, 1950, 97 min., in French with English subtitles

Adapted from a play by Arthur Schnitzler (Stanley Kubrick adapted **EYES WIDE SHUT** from his novella “Traumnovelle”) and originally banned in the U.S. due to its alleged “immorality” this roundelay of brief affairs is a carnal carousel ride – visually and thematically – narrated by puppetmaster Anton Walbrook. In 19th century Vienna, a young prostitute (Simone Signoret) momentarily loves a soldier (Serge Reggiani), who then takes up with a little maid (Simone Simon). The merry-go-round continues to whirl, with one partner from the pair always continuing into the next liaison, until the movement ends where it began. The cast could not be improved upon: Jean-Louis Barrault, Danielle Darrieux, Gérard Philippe. (*Kathleen Murphy*) Permission Cofradis, Paris.

**Monday, October 4****7:15 LIEBELEI (*Flirtation*)** Germany, 1932, 88 min., in German with English subtitles

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 another play by Schnitzler. (*Kathleen Murphy*) Print source Biograph Entertainment; permission Canal Plus, Paris.

**9:15 HAPPY HEIRS (*Die Lachenden Erben*)** Germany, 1933, 75 min., in German with English subtitles

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, but in order to prove his selfless affection for the lovely Gina he imbibes the forbidden wine. As is often true in Ophüls' world, breaking socio-economic rules may not mark the end of the world – but rather the winning of a new one. With Heinz Rühmann and Julius Falkenstein. (*Kathleen Murphy*) Print source Goethe-Institut; courtesy InterNationes, Munich.

**Tuesday, October 5****7:15 THE TROUBLE WITH MONEY (*Komedie Om Geld*)** Netherlands, 1936, 88 min., in Dutch with English subtitles

Ophüls' only Dutch film follows the extremely complex adventures of a bank clerk 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 who tells the tale of money that moves around the world. (*Kathleen Murphy*) Print source Nederlands Filmmuseum.

**9:15 THE TENDER ENEMY (*La Tendre Ennemie*)** France, 1936, 69 min., in French with English subtitles

This rarely seen comic fantasy is set in Ophülsian 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.” (*Kathleen Murphy*) Print source British Film Institute; permission Télédis, Paris.



**Wednesday, October 6****1:00, 5:00, 9:00 CAUGHT USA, 1949, 88 min.**

An extraordinarily intense examination of a love triangle involving a “nice girl” who dreams of bettering herself (Barbara Bel Geddes), a destructively neurotic, charismatic millionaire (Robert Ryan) and a good doctor (James Mason) with his feet planted firmly on the ground. 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. (*Kathleen Murphy*) Print source UCLA Film and Television Archive; permission Paramount Pictures and Kit Parker Films.

**3:00, 7:00 THE RECKLESS MOMENT USA, 1949, 82 min.**

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 absolutely worst. In what may be his most underrated film, Ophuls concentrated on the sad, oddly romantic interaction between Bennett and small-time crook (James Mason), 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. (*Kent Jones*) Print source Sony Pictures Repertory.

**Thursday, October 7****7:00 LE PLAISIR (*Pleasure*) see 10/3****9:00 LA RONDE see 10/3**

This series features the highlights of a larger retrospective, organized locally by the Pacific Film Archive, Berkeley, which is to be presented in the new PFA Theatre September 17 through October 10.

Advance tickets (\$7 general/\$6 San Francisco Film Society members) and series passes (\$35 general/\$30 San Francisco Film Society members) may be purchased beginning Monday, September 13th, at the San Francisco Film Society (1521 Eddy Street at Fillmore, Mon-Fri 10 am-5 pm), by phone (415.929.5043) and by fax (call first to request an order form). The Castro Theatre will sell series passes starting September 13th. For more information, call 415.931.FILM or log on to [www.sfiff.org](http://www.sfiff.org).

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This program is a presentation of the San Francisco Film Society, presenter of the 43rd San Francisco International Film Festival (April 20-May 4, 2000), a nonprofit arts organization whose goal is to lead in expanding the knowledge and appreciation of international film art and its artists.

**If you need a photo or would like a screener tape, please contact Hilary Hart at 415.929.5022 or [publicity@sfiff.org](mailto:publicity@sfiff.org).**

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