

## Document Citation

Title	<b>The movie palace experience: Aelita</b>
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Source	<i>Pacific Film Archive Calendar</i>
Date	1992 Apr
Type	program note
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	2
Subjects	Theremin music
Film Subjects	Aelita, Protazanov, Iakov Aleksandrovich, 1924

Friday April 17  
and  
Saturday April 18

The Movie Palace Experience--  
At the Castro Theater, S.F.:

Aelita 8:00  
Musical Score Performed by  
The Theremin Trio

Admission \$10. For program notes, see sidebar, this page.

Yakov A. Protazanov (USSR, 1924). Written by Fyodor Otsep, Alexei Faiko, based on a novel by Alexei Tolstoi. Photographed by Yuri Zhelyabuzhsky, E. Schoneman. Design by Sergei Kozlovsky, Aleksandra Ekster, Isaac Rabinovich, Victor Simov. With Valentia Kuinzhi, Nikolai Tseretelli, Konstantin Eggert, Julia Solntseva, Igor Illinsky. (90 mins, Silent with Russian intertitles and English subtitles, Live musical accompaniment, B&W, 35mm, Print from Walker Art Center courtesy Gosfilmofund, thanks to Bruce Jenkins)

## The Movie Palace Experience

### AELITA

Friday and Saturday, April 17 and 18, 8 p.m., at the Castro Theater, S.F. Admission: \$10.

The Castro Theater is the perfect setting for our celebration the famed Soviet science-fiction film Aelita (1924), showing in a beautiful new print with a musical score showcasing the lyrical and eerie tonalities of the Theremin. Dennis James will perform on the Theremin and the Wurlitzer organ; he will be accompanied by (trom-bown): Miles Anderson (baritone horn, voice and electronics) and Erica Sharp (5-string electric violin and electronics). The score is composed by Dennis James with original music for the Martian scenes composed by Miles Anderson. The Theremin, which is played by passing the hands over the instrument without touching it, was an invention of the Russian Constructivist period; it was the first electronic synthesizer and a model for the Soviet (and Constructivist) aspiration to marry art with technology. Designed and initially used in concert performances, it made its way into Hollywood film scores such as those for Spellbound (1945) and The Day the Earth Stood Still (1951).

Aelita, loosely based on a story by Alexei Tolstoi, tells of three Russians--an engineer, a soldier, and a detective--who fly to Mars and become involved in a revolutionary uprising among the Martian people. While there, the engineer has a love affair with Aelita, Queen of Mars. The lavish art direction is the most famous attribute of Aelita--costumes and sets of the fantastic Martian landscape reveal a Cubist design influence, resulting from director Yakov Protazanov's experience in the French art world, as well as the collaboration of artists from the Russian Constructivist movement. (The film was featured in the recent exhibition, Theatre in Revolution, at the Palace of the Legion of Honor.) But Protazanov was one of the leading exponents of psychological realism in the pre-revolutionary era, and Aelita is equally fascinating, though rarely cited, for its detailed look at life in the USSR: housing shortages and residual class conflicts are revealed to play havoc on personal lives. (It is this that our satirically neurotic comic heroes attempt to escape.) In contrast to its plastic beauty, the film poses an anti-Constructivist message, since, on Mars, technology has become the instrument for disenfranchizing a whole group of people. The beautiful Aelita is played by Julia Solntseva, a film director in her own right and wife and collaborator of Dovzhenko. She will be the subject of a PFA tribute later this spring.

Our presentation of Aelita is supported in part by the California Arts Council, a State agency.