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Yoshiwara, Ophüls, Max, 1937

Sans lendemain, Ophüls, Max, 1939

La tendre ennemie (The tender enemy), Ophüls, Max, 1936

The reckless moment, Ophüls, Max, 1949

Lola Montès, Ophüls, Max, 1955

La ronde, Ophüls, Max, 1950



# Pacific Film Archive

New PFA Theater:  
2575 Bancroft Way @ Bowditch  
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## Max Ophuls: Moving Pictures

Friday, September 17 through Sunday, October 10 in the New PFA Theater

The transience of love, the intransigence of memory, the circular nature of time: these are not easy things to film, but Max Ophuls filmed almost nothing *but* love, time, and memory in his richly imagined dramas. Master of the fluid image, wizard with the crane and dolly shot, “Max and his tracks” would follow the characters in and out of rooms, up and down staircases, through walls and time as if the camera had the mobility of a spirit. His period films are almost obsessively set amid turn-of-the-century European splendor, the better to show themselves to be “only superficially superficial” (to borrow Charles Boyers’s phrase from *The Earrings of Madame de...*). Their delights and tactile pleasures give way to themes both more transcendent and more troubling, with a radically sensitive depiction of women at the center.

Our tribute to Max Ophuls (1902-1957) tracks a career that traveled, stopped, circled back, much like his movies; exile made the screen his only home. Born in Germany, he wanted to be an actor, quickly found he wasn’t one, became a director, and never looked back (off screen, that is). Forced out of Germany, he worked in France; forced out of Occupation France, he worked in Hollywood; at the top of his form, he returned to France and went even higher, with *The Earrings of Madame de...*, *La Ronde*, and *Lola Montès*.

The pleasures of Ophuls are the pleasures of cinema itself, the dizzying power of the visual to transport us through time into emotion. This is cinema, to the Max.

This series is sponsored by the Consulate General of France, San Francisco; the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Goethe-Institut; InterNationes; the Italian Cultural Institute, San Francisco; and Lufthansa.

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We thank the British Film Institute; Bundesarchiv, Berlin; Munich Filmmuseum; Nederlands Filmmuseum, and UCLA Film and Television Archive.



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## FRIDAY SEPTEMBER 17

### Le Plaisir 7:30

*Max Ophuls (France, 1952)*

*Preceded by short:*

**Ave Maria de Schubert** (*Max Ophuls, France, 1936*). Schubert is sung by Elisabeth Schumann in one of two music shorts directed by Ophuls and photographed by Franz Planer for a series entitled “Music and Cinema.” (5 mins, In German, B&W, 35mm, Courtesy Munich Filmmuseum)

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(*Pleasure*). In *Le Plaisir*, the pleasure of Ophuls’s cinema is laid out in what amounts to a tour de force of his style: the circling omniscience of his camera as it describes a narrative. Three de Maupassant stories strung together tell a bittersweet truth—that pleasure and happiness are two different things. “The Mask” is a short yet affecting vignette about a man who dances his way through old age, preserving the past behind a featureless visage. “The Model” tells of the making of a couple—and the unmaking of an artist’s power over his image. “The House of Mme. Tellier” evokes the Impressionists in telling of a Normandy town whose male population is robbed of its ritual pleasure when the local madam takes all her girls to the country for her niece’s communion. There, without sentiment or condescension, we witness the prostitutes’ epiphany. Gaby Morlay, Simone Simon, Jean Gabin, and Danielle Darrieux all defy their star quality to merely perform beautifully. (JB)

- Written by Ophuls, Jacques Natanson, from three stories by Guy de Maupassant. Photographed by Christian Matras, Philippe Agostini. With Claude Dauphin, Gaby Morlay; Daniel Gélin, Simone Simon; Jean Gabin, Danielle Darrieux, Madeleine Renaud. English narration spoken by Peter Ustinov. (95 mins, In French with English subtitles and English, B&W, 35mm, Courtesy French Ministry of Foreign Affairs)

### La Signora di Tutti 9:30

*Max Ophuls (Italy, 1934)*

*Preceded by short:*

**Valse Brillante de Chopin** (*Max Ophuls, France, 1936*): Ophuls filmed pianist Alexander Brailowsky and echoed his compositions in *Letter from an Unknown Woman* a decade later. (6 mins, B&W, 35mm, Courtesy Munich Filmmuseum)

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(*Everybody’s Lady*). We first hear actress Gaby Doriot (the lovely Isa Miranda) as a disembodied voice, singing on a record while studio executives negotiate her price; we first see her face on a series of posters churning through a printing press. From the film’s opening to its final shot, when the press comes to an abrupt halt, Ophuls underlines the commercial mechanisms that transform an individual woman into that beautiful but brittle construct, Woman—Everybody’s Lady. Gaby’s melodrama journey from poverty to stardom plays out in fragmented flashbacks while expensive doctors struggle to revive her after a suicide attempt (“after spending so much, we can’t afford to panic,” say her worried handlers). Each episode demonstrates both the power of Gaby’s attractiveness and her powerlessness over its consistently disastrous consequences. As Ophuls’s graceful camera follows Gaby’s spiraling path, the story’s significance passes through satire into tragedy.—Juliet Clark

- Written by Ophuls, Curt Alexander, Hans Wilhelm, based on the novel by Salvator Gotta. Photographed by Ubaldo Arata. With Isa Miranda, Nelly Corradi, Memo Benassi, Tatiana Pavlova. (97 mins, In Italian with English subtitles, B&W, 35mm, Courtesy British Film Institute, permission Mediaset)



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## SATURDAY SEPTEMBER 18

### From Mayerling to Sarajevo 5:30

*Max Ophuls (France, 1940)*

(*De Mayerling à Sarajevo*). In this film about the love affair of Archduke Franz-Ferdinand (played by the American John Cabot Lodge) and Czech Countess Sophie Chotek (Edwige Feuillère), who marry against the wishes of the court and are later assassinated at Sarajevo, Ophuls relishes the absurdity while delighting in the elegance of court life—and of his own camerawork, fluidity describing a rigorous repression. Robin Wood comments: “*De Mayerling à Sarajevo* is not only among the most neglected, but among the finest, works of Max Ophuls. [It] is of particular importance in its explicit extension of the Ophulsian viewpoint to the world of politics: while its consciously defined political position falls within the bounds of progressive liberalism (its lovers are destroyed by a pincer-movement of reactionary and revolutionary forces), its vision of love as in itself a revolutionary force is far more radical.”

• Written by Carl Zuckmayer, from an adaptation by Curt Alexander, Ophuls, et al. Photographed by Eugen Schüfftan, Curt Courant, Otto Heller. With Edwige Feuillère, John Cabot Lodge, Gabrielle Dorziat. (90 mins, In French with English subtitles, B&W, 16mm, Courtesy French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, permission Teledis)

### Letter from an Unknown Woman 7:20, 9:10

*Max Ophuls (U.S., 1948)*

A turn-of-the-century Vienna set, with its spiral staircases, mirrors, and elaborate grillwork, becomes a haunting chiaroscuro canvas for cinematographer Franz Planer and a thematic showcase for Max and his tracks in this classic Hollywood “woman’s picture.” Joan Fontaine, an actress who seemed to make a specialty out of aggressive docility, a fugitive posture, portrays a young woman, Lisa, who builds an adolescent infatuation into a lifelong passion for a concert pianist (Louis Jourdan) who is barely aware of her existence. Lisa’s life is like the carnival ride that takes the couple, on their only night together, through the countries of Europe, a fantasy of movement that is really a circular stasis, propelled by a bemused pedaler/director. Lisa’s story, told via a posthumous letter, in being almost absurd is more troubling than it is romantic, a story for which death is the only neat closure. (JB)

• Written by Howard Koch, based on a story by Stefan Zweig. Photographed by Frank (Franz) Planer. With Joan Fontaine, Louis Jourdan, Mady Christians, Marcel Journet. (90 mins, B&W, 35mm, Courtesy UCLA Film & Television Archive, permission Kit Parker Films)

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## SUNDAY SEPTEMBER 19

### No Tomorrow 5:30

*Max Ophuls (France, 1939)*

(*Sans Lendemain*). The marvelous Edwige Feuillère stars in one of Ophuls’s key prewar French films. A Montmartre nightclub stripper with a son to raise reconnects with a suitor from more respectable times and, determined to keep up appearances, turns to an underworld kingpin for a loan. But regaining her former station exacts an ever higher price; as the title (and so much of Ophuls) suggests, the future cannot hope to compete with the past. The shattered pretense of Paris in the dawn camera of Eugen Schüfftan links this film with the Romantic Fatalism of the thirties and (more eerily) predicts Bresson’s *Les Dames du Bois du Bologne* of 1949. But the depths of its women-centered melodrama places it in league with Ophuls’s American films like *Letter from an Unknown Woman*. As Paul Willemen wrote, “Both are films...about total loss, with women as victims of male fantasies as much as of economic forces.”(JB)



(Please note: Shown in French, with written English synopsis.)

- Written by Hans Wilhelm (under the pseudonym Jean Villeme). Photographed by Eugen Schüfftan. With Edwige Feuillère, Georges Rigaud, Daniel Lecourtois, Georges Lanne. (82 mins, In French, B&W, 35mm, From Teledis)

## La Signora di Tutti 7:10

Please see program notes for September 17.

## Le Plaisir 9:10

Please see program notes for September 17.

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### FRIDAY SEPTEMBER 24

## The Earrings of Madame de... 7:30

*Max Ophuls (France/Italy, 1953)*

(*Madame de...*). A narcissistic countess, whom we shall call Madame de... (Danielle Darrieux), is given a pair of earrings by her husband (Charles Boyer). When she sells them to pay off debts, her husband buys them back to give to his mistress who, in her turn, sells the earrings, and they wind up in the hands of a diplomat (Vittorio de Sica) on his way to France. He will give them as a gift to his lover, a certain Madame de... This story of a life compromised by a pair of earrings is, for many, Ophuls's masterpiece; Pauline Kael had one word for it: "Perfection." Ophuls, his camera set to the tempo of a waltz, lifts a deceptively lavish screen to expose the hypocrisies of married love and the bitter aftertaste of romance. Boyer was never better than as the husband lost to a love he understands all too well, and Darrieux embodies the Belle Époque woman, the passionate waste of a soul. Eleven years and a century later, she will be Monica Vitti in *Red Desert*. (JB)

- Written by Marcel Achard, Ophuls, Annette Wademant, from a novella by Louise de Vilmorin. Photographed by Christian Matras. With Danielle Darrieux, Charles Boyer, Vittorio de Sica, Mireille Perrey. (105 mins, In French with English subtitles, B&W, 35mm, Courtesy British Film Institute, permission Teledis)

## Liebelei 9:35

*Max Ophuls (Germany, 1932)*

(*Flirtation*). Ophuls's last German film before his exile, this adaptation of a Schnitzler drama is both a biting critique of outmoded social conventions and a lyrical evocation of a love that transcends life itself. "Since I met you, the past doesn't count," a sensitive young lieutenant tells his new sweetheart (Magda Schneider) on an idyllic sleigh ride in turn-of-the-century Vienna. But experience soon proves that the past and its indiscretions can be a matter of life and death. Despite its indictment of military hypocrisy—in one remarkable scene, a soldier convincingly insists to his commanding officer that "any shot not fired in self-defense is a criminal act"—*Liebelei* enjoyed great popularity in Nazi Germany, where it was released in 1933 with the names of Ophuls (né Oppenheimer) and Schnitzler significantly excised from the credits. *Liebelei* is unmistakably Ophuls, from its atmosphere of morally dubious Old World elegance to its devastating tracking shots, prefiguring *The Earrings of Madame de...*—Juliet Clark

- Written by Hans Wilhelm, Curt Alexander, Ophuls, based on the play by Arthur Schnitzler. Photographed by Franz Planer. With Magda Schneider, Wolfgang Liebeneiner, Luise Ullrich, Willy Eichberger. (88 mins, In German with English subtitles, B&W, 35mm, From Biograph Entertainment, permission Canal Plus)



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## SATURDAY SEPTEMBER 25

### The Company's in Love 5:30

*Max Ophuls (Germany, 1931)*

(*Verliebte Firma*). While trying to make a film on location, the members of a movie troupe all fall in love with the girl in the local telegraph office and decide she might well replace their own untalented star. But she is unable to telegraph her charm before the camera. Ophuls told Jacques Rivette and François Truffaut in a *Cahiers du Cinéma* interview that this early musical comedy holds a special place for him as the first film in which he felt he could impose a rhythm from beginning to end.

(Please note: Shown in German, with written English synopsis.)

- Written by Dr. Fritz Zeckendorf, from an idea by Ernst Marischka, Bruno Granichstaedten. Photographed by Karl Puth. With Anny Ahlers, Gustave Frölich, Lien Eyers, Ernst Verebes. (72 mins, In German, B&W, 35mm, Courtesy Goethe-Institut, InterNaciones)

### The Tender Enemy 7:00

*Max Ophuls (France, 1936)*

(*La Tendre Ennemie*). Boulevard comedy masks mordant social satire in this adaptation of a play by André-Paul Antoine. Ophuls, master of the flashback, here has the past visit the present in the form of three ghosts, the spirits of three men who in life were tormented by their shared “tender enemy,” Annette Dupont (Simone Berriau). One ghost was her girlhood sweetheart, another her husband, the third, her lover, each a victim of Annette’s despair at a forced marriage. In life, they were kept ignorant of each other’s existence, but disembodied, they are comrades in arms. Their visit is timed to coincide with the party Annette is giving as she forces her own daughter into a loveless union; by clever trickery they hope to avoid a second tragedy. Amid the comedy, the stylized sets, and a flirtation with supernatural experimentation, Ophuls offers a rather icy picture of how the female is formed into an “enemy” by repression and double standards.

- Written by Ophuls, Curt Alexander, based on the play *L'Ennemie* by André-Paul Antoine. Photographed by Eugen Schüfftan, Lucien Colas. With Simone Berriau, Georges Vitray, Jacqueline Daix, Catherine Fonteney. (69 mins, In French with English subtitles, B&W, 35mm, Courtesy British Film Institute, permission Teledis)

### The Earrings of Madame de... 8:30

Please see program notes for September 24.

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## SUNDAY SEPTEMBER 26

### The Bartered Bride 5:30

*Max Ophuls (Germany, 1932)*

(*Die verkaufte Braut*). Ophuls’s second film brought him renown, in part for his gumption in building a whole “Czech” village in the hills of Geiseltal and engaging the locals—including fairground denizens—as actors. The diva Jarmila Novotna starred in this film version of Smetana’s comic opera about a mayor’s daughter who rejects her arranged engagement to a rich twit and goes off instead with the boy she loves, only to find that there is still a price for her hand. Paul Willemsen finds the film, which mixes sung dialogue with spoken, “a fascinating and humorous reflection on the very procedures and pleasures of spectacle...squarely in the tradition of the ‘narrative avant garde’ foreshadowing *Lola Montès*...” A 1932 review had Ophuls’s number: “[T]he aim of the film seems to be to drag the lavish rhythms from their frame and dissolve the opera into a whirl of rapture and movement.”

(Please note: Shown in German, with written English synopsis.)



- Written by Curt Alexander, from the opera by Friedrich Smetana. Music by Smetana, lyrics by Robert Vambéry. Photographed by Reimar Kuntze, Franz Koch. With Jarmila Novotna, Willi Domgraf-Fassbaender, Karl Valentin, Liesl Karstadt. (76 mins, In German, B&W, 35mm, Courtesy Bundesarchiv, Berlin)

## The Trouble with Money 7:05

*Max Ophuls (The Netherlands, 1936)*

(*Komedie om geld*). Ophuls's one Dutch film, made during his French period, remains a landmark in Dutch cinema. A comic yet caustic parable about the perils of capital, the film follows a bank courier, Brand (Herman Boubert), who loses a large deposit and is fired. Brand meets some shady characters associated with international finance and from the depths of disgrace finds himself on the top of the heap; now the passive clerk has his shot at playing the authoritarian windbag. Ophuls's delirious tracking shots and psychologically motivated compositions, a *mise-en-scène* crafted to express the overweening influence of power, were a drastic departure from an indigenous cinema that stressed entertainment. To further sabotage the moment's amusement, Ophuls incorporated the Brechtian element of a singing ringmaster who interjects a commentary on the events, looking forward to the puppetmaster of *La Ronde*, the ringmaster of *Lola Montès*.

- Written by Ophuls, Walter Schlee, Alex de Haan. Photographed by Eugen Schüfftan. With Herman Boubert, Matthieu van Eysden, Rini Otte, Cor Ruys. (88 mins, In Dutch with English subtitles, B&W, 35mm, Courtesy Nederlands Filmmuseum)

## Happy Heirs 8:55

*Max Ophuls (Germany, 1933)*

(*Die lachende Erben*). "Why work hard and save all your life when your money will only go to your happy heirs?" goes the German saying whose irony informs this musical comedy. A *Romeo and Juliet* of the Rhineland, the story tells of a fierce competition between two champagne-making families, the Bockelmanns and the Stumms, whose greed is matched only by their animosity, and whose respective children fall in love with each other. Young Peter is challenged by his uncle's will to abstain from drinking wine altogether for a month in order to inherit the family fortune, but love for Gina requires him to lift the forbidden cup. As in so much of Ophuls, romance and money are entangled; but unlike the tragedies, here, to love is not only human, it turns a profit.

- Written by Trude Herka. Photographed by Eduard Hoesch. With Heinz Rühmann, Lien Deyers, Lizzi Waldmüller, Ida Wüst, Julius Falkenstein. (75 mins, In German with English subtitles, B&W, 35mm, Courtesy Goethe-Institut, InterNaciones)

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### SATURDAY OCTOBER 2

## Caught 5:30, 9:00

*Max Ophuls (U.S., 1949)*

It looks like working-class charm-school student Barbara Bel Geddes's ship has come in when she's invited to a millionaire's yachting party. She misses the boat but catches the millionaire, and soon our heroine is successfully ensconced in a grim Long Island Gothic mansion, staving off loneliness with pills, waiting for her husband—bitter, driven Robert Ryan—to come home. One of the morals of this darkly ironic Cinderella story is that marrying money may bring a woman security—but prisons are secure, too. It's no surprise that when Bel Geddes tries to trade in the hollow luxury of her married life for the human chaos of James Mason's Lower East Side doctor's office, she meets with formidable resistance from her husband, who says "women are a dime a dozen" but who monomaniacally insists on protecting his investments. Like the similarly noir-shaded *Reckless Moment*, *Caught* shows a European's disturbing



insight into the pitfalls of postwar American domesticity. Thanks in part to Lee Garmes's Wellesian cinematography, the dream house has rarely looked so sinister.—Juliet Clark

- Written by Arthur Laurents, based on the novel *Wild Calendar* by Libbie Block. Photographed by Lee Garmes. With James Mason, Barbara Bel Geddes, Robert Ryan, Ruth Brady. (88 mins, B&W, 35mm, Courtesy UCLA Film & Television Archive, permission Kit Parker Films)

## The Reckless Moment 7:15

*Max Ophuls (U.S., 1949)*

Like *Caught*, this is a masterpiece of the kind of dark melodrama that exposed the quality of domestic American life in the late forties. At the same time it is squarely in the Ophuls oeuvre: *The Reckless Moment* builds its considerable suspense on the illusions harbored by the suburban middle-class woman. Joan Bennett stars as a repressed but contented housewife whose routine existence is shattered by her daughter's involvement with a philanderer, and by her own role in his death. James Mason is cast against type as a lower-class blackmailer who smooths his way into Bennett's life, trying to pin her down. Their intense spider-and-fly relationship gradually softens as his wistful charm turns to sympathy. Ophuls's eye for detail in deep-focus compositions, made famous in his French films *La Ronde* and *Lola Montès*, is already evident here, and Burnett Guffey's camerawork uses the sunlight of a small-town locale for a harsh southern (California) exposure.

- Written by Henry Garson, Robert Soderburg, based on a serialized novel, *The Blank Wall*, by Elizabeth Saxnay Holding. Photographed by Burnett Guffey. With James Mason, Joan Bennett, Geraldine Brooks. (82 mins, B&W, 35mm, From Columbia Pictures Repertory)

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## SUNDAY OCTOBER 3

## Yoshiwara 5:30

*Max Ophuls (France, 1937)*

A rare departure for Ophuls, this film set in Japan tells of a beautiful aristocrat, Kohana (Michiko Tanaka), who is sold as a geisha to pay off the family debts. Sessue Hayakawa plays the coolie, an impoverished sketch artist in his better moments, who transports Kohana to Tokyo's Yoshiwara pleasure district and never forgets her face of despair. A Russian naval officer buys Kohana's temporary freedom, only to place her in his own fantasy, ball gown, caviar, and all (in a scene reminiscent of the fantasy tour of *Letter from an Unknown Woman*); and ultimately to involve her in a reality of deadly intrigue. More than a cinematic *Madame Butterfly*, we see that Ophuls in Japanese translates to Mizoguchi, another master of the tracking shot and another male director who is famously identified with the women who are sacrifices to male desire. (JB)

(Please note: Shown in French, with written English synopsis.)

- Written by Maurice Dekobra, based on his novel, adapted by Arnold Lippschitz, Ophuls, et al. Photographed by Eugen Schüfftan. With Pierre-Richard Willm, Michiko Tanaka, Sessue Hayakawa, Lucienne Le Marchand. (88 mins, In French, B&W, 35mm, From Teledis)

## The Tender Enemy 7:20

Please see program notes for September 25.

## The Trouble with Money 8:50

Please see program notes for September 26.



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## SATURDAY OCTOBER 9

### Lola Montès 7:00

*Max Ophuls (France, 1955)*

The *Cahiers du Cinéma* critics were almost alone in championing Ophuls's commercially disastrous last film. Time has validated them. Ophuls did some of their critical work for them in this self-reflexive film in which narrative is first *de-* and then beautifully *reconstructed*. The film recounts in flashbacks the life of the courtesan Lola Montès (Martine Carol), who ended her days as a circus attraction in a series of gaudy tableaux depicting her scandalous life. Peter Ustinov, extraordinary in the role of the ringmaster, invites the audience to ask "the most indelicate questions" of this "monster of cruelty with the eyes of an angel." She is the cinema's femme fatale come full circle; she is the artist himself, who similarly laid himself open with this film. The flashback also is stripped of contrivance: it becomes pure emotion, the past of a woman who has no present. This is further distilled in the wild colors and sets through which "Max and his tracks" roam, free of any allegiance to narrative space. (JB)

- Written by Jacques Nathanson, Annette Wademant, Ophuls, based on the novel by Cecil Saint-Laurent. Photographed by Christian Matras. With Martine Carol, Peter Ustinov, Anton Walbrook, Oskar Werner. (110 mins, In French with English subtitles, Color, 'Scope, 35mm, Courtesy French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, permission Les Films du Jeudi)

### La Ronde 9:10 (tentative)

*Max Ophuls (France, 1950)*

Set in the Vienna of the waltz, this exquisite and witty film describes love's ceaseless roundabout starting with a prostitute (Simone Signoret) who loves a soldier (Serge Reggiani) who leaves her for a chambermaid (Simone Simon) who...etc., etc., until the story comes back to the prostitute, just as the earrings will come back to Madame De... In *La Ronde*, "the normal narrow view of movie stories, always going forward towards destiny and resolution, is abandoned in favor of the more mocking designs of hazard, obliqueness, and digression, a dance in which the dancers do not hear the beat but in which they revert helplessly to where they began, older and no wiser. *La Ronde* did help pioneer episode films with all-star casts [but] for Ophuls, this commercial novelty was less important than a dramatic form which is as pretty, as enclosing, and yet as unending as a watch....The film goes round and round. The convenience of 'ending' is its one lie." (David Thomson)

- Written by Ophuls, Jacques Natanson, based on the play *Der Reigen* by Arthur Schnitzler. Photographed by Christian Matras. With Anton Walbrook, Simone Signoret, Serge Reggiani, Simone Simon, Daniel Gélin, Danielle Darrieux, Jean-Louis Barrault, Isa Miranda, Gérard Philippe. (97 mins, In French with English subtitles, B&W, 35mm, Permission Cofradis)

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## SUNDAY OCTOBER 10

### Lola Montès 5:30

Please see program notes for October 9.