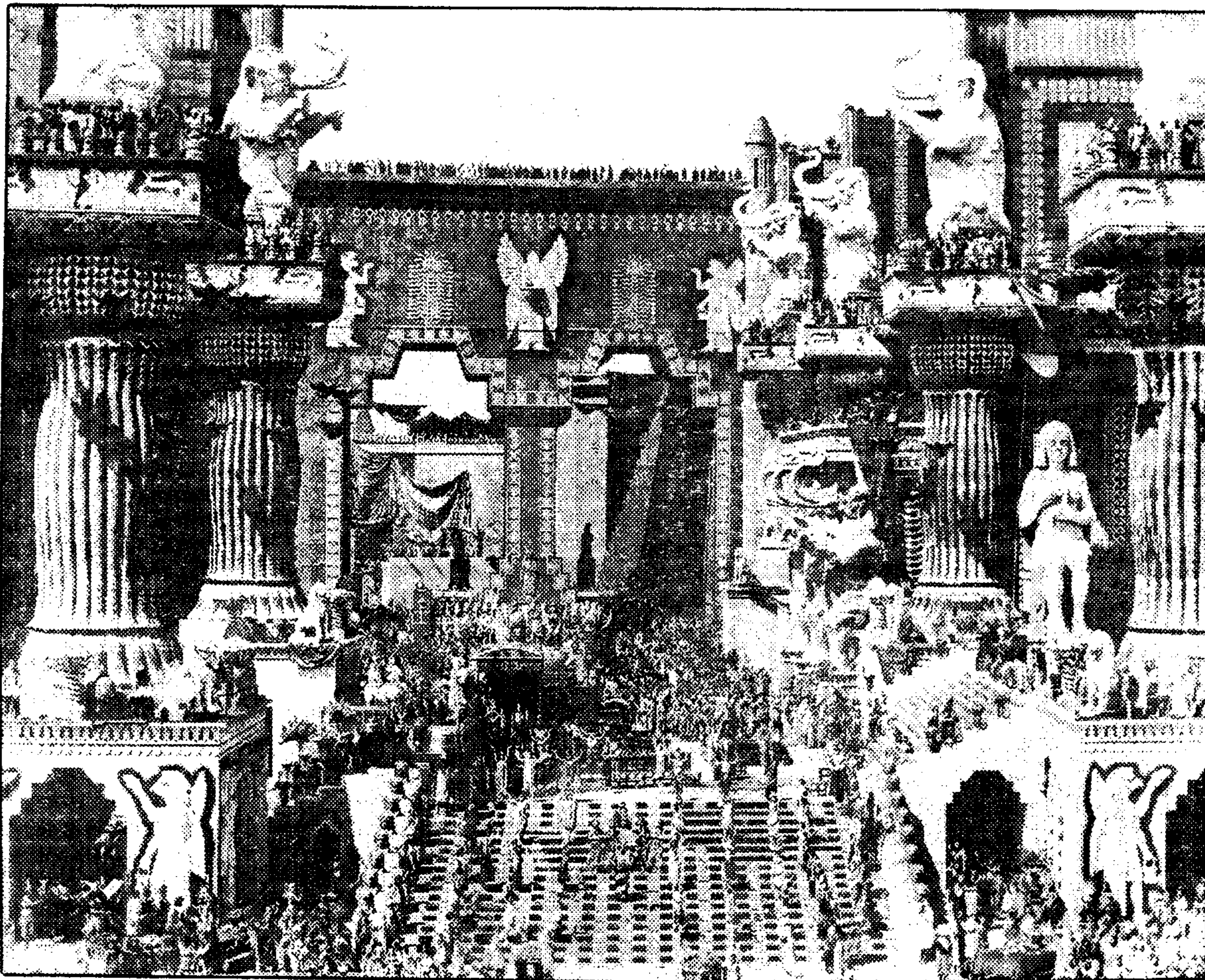


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'Intolerance' Restored



The epic set for 'Intolerance,' constructed behind a row of bungalows along Sunset Boulevard

Griffith Epic Now Bigger Than Bigger Than Life

BY MAX ALEXANDER

New York

IMAGINE an elephant as big as a brownstone, rearing back, straight up, on its hind legs. Place the pachyderm atop a column twice as high again. The column is on an arch, flanked by scores of stairs. Multiply by six, surround with stenciled walls taller than Times Square billboards, throw in a few more oversize elephants, sundry 10-foot lions and 5,000 antlike humans on a movie set.

"Indiana Jones and the Lost Republican Convention"? Maybe today, but the year was 1915; the scene was Babylon; the director was D. W. Griffith; and the film was "Intolerance." The towering set went up behind bungalows off Sunset Boulevard. It was a good year for carpenters in California.

The set is long gone, but a new, \$120,000 reconstructed and tinted print of the 3½-hour epic — starring Mae Marsh and Lillian Gish — is back in some theaters. (In San Francisco, it will screen Friday at the Castro. The silent film will be accompanied by Dennis James on

the Wurlitzer. He will work the original score by Joseph Carl Breil into his own composition.)

"Intolerance" is the latest in a series of recently restored epics such as "Gone With the Wind" and "Lawrence of Arabia." "Intoler-

this note, she's supposed to be kissing him. When you saw that scene on the screen and you saw those words in your score, you knew you were supposed to be on the note that's under those words. But in retrospect, what we had was the evi-

'Intolerance' was never entirely lost, but the film was never entirely whole after 1916

ance" recently became one of the first 25 films placed by the Library of Congress on the new National Film Registry of significant films.

The music is more than icing on the cake; it made the restoration possible. In a seven-year collaboration between the New York Museum of Modern Art and the Library of Congress, "Intolerance" was reconstructed largely by analyzing the 325 conductor's cues and 88 metronome markings on the 189-page score.

Gillian B. Anderson, the music specialist at the Library of Congress who interpreted the music, explains that Breil and Griffith "would make the score in such a way that it would say, at this particular point, over

dence for the entire organization of the film."

"Intolerance" was never entirely lost, but it was never entirely whole after 1916. "Griffith constantly re-edited his films and he never used a script," says Peter Williamson, the film technician at the Museum of Modern Art who supervised the restoration. The film, subtitled "Love's Struggle Throughout the Ages," consists of four interwoven stories of man's cruelty to man: the fall of Babylon, the crucifixion of Christ, the Saint Bartholomew's Day massacre in medieval France and the modern story of a man wrongly accused of murder.

"Intolerance" was both ahead of its time — audiences couldn't

keep up with Griffith's acrobatic editing — and behind the times: On the eve of America's entry into World War I, the movie's theme of pacifism doomed it at the box office.

Griffith immediately made drastic changes in his \$2 million film; when distributors sued, demanding the original, even the director couldn't put it back together. He donated two later prints to the Museum of Modern Art in 1938 and even tried to edit those, until he reportedly was barred from the museum's projection booth. He died in 1948.

"We are not evaluating Griffith's re-editing after the opening," emphasizes Mary Lea Bandy, director of the museum's film department, "but we see it as our basic

The copyright office found Griffith's scrapbooks with a single frame from each of the film's 2,203 shots

archival purpose to reconstruct what was initially presented to the public."

Work began in 1982. At the George Eastman House in Rochester, a curator about to retire recalled having received a 1917 print of "Intolerance" from South America in 1954. That print, 11,600 feet long, had migrated to the Danske Filmuseum in Denmark for preservation. "It had 1,600 more feet than our two versions, but it was still not the premiere print," Williamson says.

In 1983, the Library of Congress dug up Griffith's original copyright material — scrapbooks holding a single frame from each of the film's 2,203 shots. "That gave us a record of his work print three months before the opening," Williamson says. The museum also had 1,500 feet of an original print that documented the color tints. UCLA's film archive provided a postpremiere title list. (Sample: "Put away thy perfumes, thy garments of Assinnu, the female man. I shall love none but a soldier.") Using Anderson's cue lists and music timings, Williamson began assembling a work print — the cinematic equivalent of a rough draft — from the gathered film stock in 1983, "with me not able to read music and Gill not having seen the film," he says.

Much of the score had no metronome markings, or simply said, "Repeat until next cue." Enter a pianist, who played while Williamson screened possible sequences. Seconds of film time translated into days of work, and eventually into five years. The final negative is now 80 percent to 90 percent restored, Williamson says, but 200 shots — 11 minutes — remain lost and are replaced with freeze frames from the copyright scrapbooks.

"Intolerance" screens Friday at the Castro Theater.