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NATIONAL FILM THEATRE PROGRAMME NOTES

TRIBUTE TO B.B.C. WORLD CINEMA

PANDORA'S BOX

Director: G.W.Pabst
Producer: George C.Horsetzky
Assistant Directors: Mark Sorkin, Paul Falkenberg
Editor: Joseph R. Fliesler
Art Director: Andrei Andreiev
Costumes: Gottlieb Hesch
Photography: Gunther Krampf
Screenplay: Ladislaus Vajda
From two plays by: Frank Wedekind
CAST: Lulu.....Louise Brooks
Dr. Peter Schon.....Fritz Kortner
Alwa Schon, his son.....Franz Lederer
Schigolch (Papa Brommer).....Carl Gotz
Countess Anna Geschwitz.....Alice Roberts
Marie de Zarziko.....Daisy D'Ora
Rodrigo Quast.....Krafft Raschig
Marquis Casti-Piani.....Michael von Newlinsky
The Stage Manager.....Siegfried Arno
Jack the Ripper.....Gustav Diessl

1928 GERMANY

Nero Film

Thanks to the courtesy of Miss Brooks and a major American archive, this print prepared for the B.B.C. World Cinema series is probably the most complete in existence. The main additions can be found in a myriad of small details, scenes, reaction shots in the early part of the picture (notably the trial scene) and the sequences on the gambling ship are now much more detailed, linking the characters together in a more logical construction.

The two plays on which PANDORA'S BOX is based were written by Frank Wedekind at the end of the last century. He was obsessed with the anomalies and destructive power of sex and his attitude was not unlike that of Strindberg whom he knew in Paris. It was, in fact, in Paris that he got the idea for his central character of Lulu, who formed the subject of a pantomime at a Grand Guignol Theatre. Wedekind reacted against German Naturalism and his plays are as full-blown and direct as anything the Elizabethans could produce; indeed, the nearest parallel to his Lulu cycle is The Duchess of Malfi, except that in the former case the woman is the active principal of evil. It is interesting to note how Pabst has used this closely packed material. The first play Erdgeist deals with the destruction by Lulu of her husband Dr. Goll, a painter Schwartz and ultimately Dr. Schon, whose wife she has also poisoned. Among the many other victims of her insatiable lusts are Rodrigo, a strong man; Alwa Schon, son of her earlier victim; Countess Geschwitz, a Lesbian; and a schoolboy, Hugenberg. The killing of Dr. Schon in the play is a masterly piece of staging with all the other characters present in a setting reminiscent of a monkey house. Of this material Pabst has retained the story of Dr. Schon and his son. Rodrigo makes his appearance but Countess Geschwitz has been transposed into the role of Anna, a companion of Lulu from her poverty-stricken youth. Schigolch, Lulu's disreputable elderly associate, has become Papa Brommer. The action of the theatre scene is substantially retained, but the killing of Schon is handled in the film on a much more intimate basis. The second play, Pandora's Box which Wedekind spent nine years in writing, was banned because its central character is the Lesbian Countess Geschwitz. It was first privately produced in Vienne in 1905. The first act is set in Germany where Lulu's friends plan her escape from prison, mainly carried out by the Countess and in a different way from the film. The second act is set in Paris where Lulu is now gambling with her companion, Alwa Schon, and is desperately trying to avoid betrayal by the pimp Casti-

/P.T.O.

Piani and the strong man Rodrigo. The latter is led to his death at the hands of Schigolch (Papa Brommer) by the Countess, and Lulu is thus helped to escape from the law. Pabst has transferred the action of this section to the gambling den on the boat where Anna is made to murder Rodrigo. The final act of Pandora's Box is set in a dingy attic room in London. This is pure Walpurgis Nacht. Lulu brings in her customers who include an African Crown Prince, a mute, and a Professor of Philosophy; and finally, of course, Jack who murders both her and the Countess. The Salvation Army scenes are film inventions and the well-developed Jack the Ripper sequence is dismissed in the play with a few pages of scanty dialogue. The American poet H.D. records a visit to Pabst when he was making PANDORA'S BOX in 1929. He had just come from seeing the premiere of JEANNE D'ARC by Carl Dreyer and was full of appreciation of the film and despair at the futility of German films: "It was not so much the film which had depressed him as the fact that France was able to make the experiment, and Germany was going where it was. How could anyone here in Germany expect to do anything ever?". Looking at PANDORA'S BOX today one is struck by the curious resemblance it bears to the Dreyer film. Both directors had taken a comparatively unknown actress and drawn out of her a performance such as she had never given before nor would ever give again. When Falconetti left Dreyer and Louise Brooks left Pabst, their careers were ended. It was as if all they had got to give had been drained from them. The methods of both films, too were similar. The camera moves in and observes relentlessly every nuance of the human personality. The very contrast of good and evil which the two films represent makes this identical technique all the more striking.

Piano Accompaniments:

3.30

Philip Colman

6.15

Graham Nichols

8.45

Robin Saunders