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THE LEAD SHOES
SIDNEY PETERSON

1949, 18 minutes, b&w.

A surrealistic comedy based on themes suggested by two old ballads, "Edward" and "The Three Ravens" and featuring such disparate elements as a woman dragging a figure in a diving suit, a hopscotch game and a kilted man.

A man of numerous talents, Sidney Peterson has studied medicine and been a sculptor, a seaman, a newspaperman, a draftsman for a naval architect, a novelist (his best known work being The Fly in the Pigment), as well as a filmmaker. He also ran the first film workshop at the California School of Fine Arts.

Peterson's avant-garde works - from his first film, The Potted Psalm, made with James Broughton, to his last, and perhaps best-known work, The Lead Shoes - are involved with myth and ritual and show a great comic sensibility, a unique use of distorting anamorphic lenses and an innovative exploration of sound. Peterson also had the singular ability to make use of whatever props, actors, musicians, etc. were available. In the case of The Lead Shoes, these were, respectively, a diving suit and a kilt, Peterson's students, and a jazz band made up of the faculty of the California School of Fine Arts. Through anamorphosis, editing, and as Stuart Liebman points out in Essay 2 of the exhibition catalogue, the associative interplay between dense soundtrack, consisting of the two aforementioned ballads, and images, Peterson created a hypnotic, dream-like film in which, as he says, "Narrative succumbs to the comic devices of inconsequence and illogic."

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