

The Phantom of the Opera

“Improvise, v. trans.: To compose (verse, music, etc.) on the spur of the moment; to utter or perform extempore.”

David Briggs is among the most important British exponents of the art of improvisation to have lived, his legendary skill not only delighting audiences the world over but inspiring the rising generation of organists to pursue the art seriously.

The ability to sustain improvisation for anything up to two hours for a film accompaniment is something else again. In fact, live musical accompaniment was the norm in the early days of cinema, and the tradition never died out completely, but David Briggs is unique in the extent to which he has made a go of it in our times. Thanks to him, events such as tonight's have become very popular, not least because they are something a bit different, and also because they are definitely not just for organ aficionados.

David's film repertoire is large and growing -- he has played accompaniment to dozens of films including Lang's *Metropolis*, Hitchcock's *The Lodger* and shorts by Chaplain and Keaton. For all this, he also remains a repertoire recitalist of the front rank and a highly prolific composer.

The Original Phantom of the Opera (1925)

The 1925 silent film version of *The Phantom of the Opera*, directed by Rupert Julian, is a classic adaptation of Gaston Leroux's novel *Le Fantôme de l'Opéra*.

The film stars Lon Chaney in the title role as the masked and facially deformed 'phantom' who haunts the Paris Opera House, causing murder and mayhem in an attempt to force the management to make the woman he loves a star. It is most famous for Lon Chaney's intentionally horrific, self-applied make-up, which was kept a studio secret until the film's premier.

The film also features Mary Philbin, Norman Kerry, Arthur Edmund Carewe, Gibson Gowland, John St. Polis and Snitz Edwards. The only surviving cast member is Carla Laemmle (born 1909), niece of producer Carl Laemmle, who played a small role as *prima ballerina* in the film when she was about 15.

The movie was adapted by Elliott J. Clawson, Frank M. McCormack (uncredited), Tom Reed (titles) and Raymond L. Schrock. It was directed by Rupert Julian, with supplemental direction by Edward Sedgwick, and Lon Chaney (unconfirmed).

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