

207 Titles, Mostly Silents

Yale Acquires Collection Of Classic Films

By REID DETCHON

Yale has begun its own film archives by acquiring the Griggs Collection of Classic Films, Provost Charles Taylor announced yesterday.

One of the finest private collections of classic films in the country, the Griggs Collection contains 207 titles, most of them silent films shot in the twenties. Virtually every major American film-maker up to 1940 is represented.

Prior to the acquisition Yale had no permanent collection of its own and depended on rentals, mostly from New York's Museum of Modern Art, for teaching purposes.

The collection was obtained from Mrs. Mary N. Griggs, mother of Timothy Griggs, 1964. Three alumni provided the funds necessary for purchase: Fred W. Beinecke, 1966; Richard E. Fuller and Chester J. LaRoche Jr., both 1918.

Film Council Established

Taylor also announced the establishment of the University Film Council, an informal coordinating board to advise on programs of film study and film-making at Yale.

Standish D. Lawder, assistant professor of history of art, was named curator of the collection. Lawder, who teaches a course on the history and art of cinema, was largely responsible for bringing the collection to Yale.

Spencer M. Berger, one of the country's leading authorities on the film career of the Barrymores, and the owner of an extensive private collection himself, will serve through the Yale Library as an advisor to the newly-created Yale Film Collection. Berger also played a key role in the acquisition of the Griggs Collection, Lawder said yesterday.

The collection was assembled by the late John Griggs, a former movie actor and dealer in classic films, whose hobby was collecting and screening the films for his friends and neighbors in Englewood, N.J.

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According to Berger, Griggs "never strove for a rounded collection in the historical sense, but his personal interests and enthusiasms were so broad that he inevitably wound up with one of the largest and most worthwhile personal collections I know of."

The core of the collection is in the American film. D.W. Griffith's monumental "Birth of a Nation" of 1916 documents the beginning of the narrative film, and other titles by Griffith (including "Intolerance") provide a comprehensive survey of his work.

Fairbanks, Chaplin

There are a number of films of Douglas Fairbanks and also some of Charlie Chaplin, including several important one-reelers of the early days. Among them are "Easy Street," "A Dog's Life," "Shoulder Arms," and "The Gold Rush."

Other key figures in the American silent comedy — Buster Keaton, Harold Lloyd, and Mack Sennett — are represented by a total of 14 films.

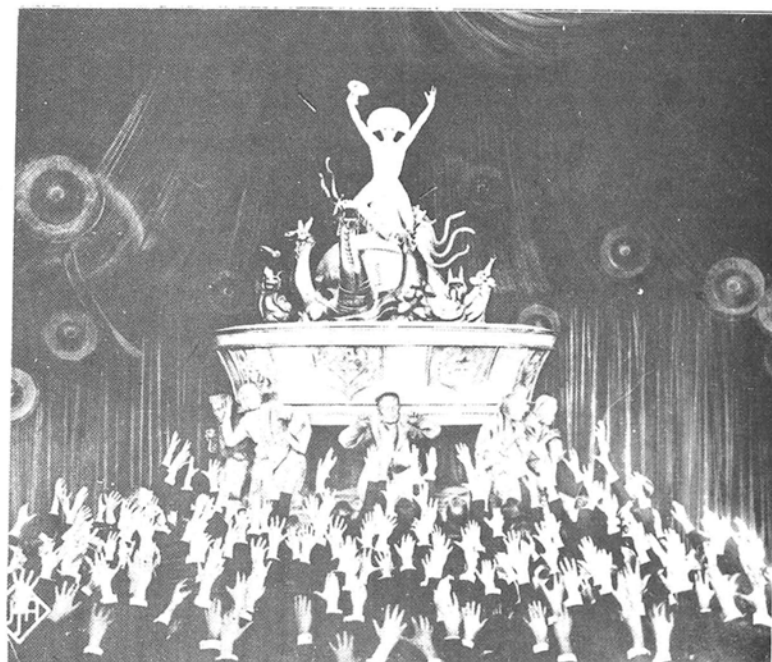
The collection also includes:

- early Westerns by William S. Hart ("Tumbleweeds") and James Cruze ("The Covered Wagon");
- horror films by Lon Chaney ("The Phantom of the Opera," "The Hunchback of Notre Dame");
- sophisticated night-club comedies by Raymond Griffith; and
- serious dramatic films by John Barrymore ("Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde"), and Erich von Stroheim.

Lawder also cites 50 or more films as belonging to the American genre category, i.e., American films emanating from Hollywood which were typical of their time.

20 Foreign Films

The 20 foreign films in the collection represent "a superb sampling of the early European and Russian cinema," according to Lawder. "Potemkin" and "Ten Days That Shook the World" document Sergei Eisenstein's work, and Fritz Lang is represented by "Metropolis."



Early film directors' penchant for the spectacular is reflected in this scene from Fritz Lang's classic, "Metropolis," one of 207 films Yale has acquired in the Griggs Collection, considered one of the finest private collections in the country.



The American film classic, "Salome" (1922), was an attempt to bring the art nouveau rhythm of Aubrey Beardsley to the screen. Above is a scene with the star, the dancer Nazimova.

The collection also includes 150 taped musical scores prepared by Griggs to accompany the silents, as well as a number of old slides of movie theater notices, slide projectors, lobby display photographs, posters, and movie memorabilia.

The condition of the Griggs Collection is excellent, according to Lawder; Berger also testifies to Griggs' "passion for quality." Many of the prints are taken from the original negatives. Lawder says reprints will be made for preservation purposes once funds become available.

Film Study Center

The question of access to the films is still undecided. Lawder says he would like to see a Film Study Center established so that students could consult films just as they now do books, but at present Yale has nothing approaching the necessary funds or facilities.

Lawder says he will be the most frequent user of the collection at first with his film history and modern art courses. But he emphasizes the collection was "not a History of Art Department acquisition by any means," adding the films could be used for a variety of disciplines, including history, sociology, and American studies.

'Provincial Insularity'

Film-making courses will also take considerable advantage of the collection. Lawder blames the inaccessibility of films for "so much of the provincial insularity that plagues new film-makers. The incredible riches of the Griggs Collection will open the students' eyes to the storehouse of the past and the widely varied means of filmic expression it contains."