



Pedals & Pipes 2023–24 Concert Series
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THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA (SILENT FILM)

Sunday, Oct. 22, 2023 @ 3 p.m.

Dennis James, organ

Directed by Rupert Julian

Produced by Carl Laemmle

Based on a Novel by Gaston Leroux

Adapted by Elliott J. Clawson and

Raymond L. Schrock

Cinematography by Milton Bridenbecker,

Virgil Miller, and Charles Van Enger

Lon Chaney, The Phantom

Mary Philbin, Christine Daae

Norman Kerry, Vicomte Raoul de Chagny

Arthur Edmund Carewe, Ledoux

Gibson Gowland, Simon Buquet

John St. Polis, Comte Phillip de Chagny

Snitz Edwards, Florine Papillion

Mary Fabian, Carlotta

Virginia Pearson, Carlotta / Carlotta's Mother

Performance at the Segerstrom Center for the Arts

Renée and Henry Segerstrom Concert Hall & Lobby

PROGRAM

HINRICHS

The Phantom of the Opera
(1925 Silent Film)

Just in time for Halloween, organist and internationally renowned silent-film accompanist Dennis James provides a chilling soundtrack to the classic 1925 silent film *The Phantom of the Opera* starring Lon Chaney, Sr. in which a mad, disfigured composer seeks love with a lovely young opera singer. See this extraordinary film on the big screen while experiencing the overwhelming sounds from the 4,322-pipe organ.

ABOUT THE ARTIST



For more than 50 years, Dennis James has played a pivotal role in the international revival of silent films presented with live music. Starting as a pianist for university screenings, James now tours worldwide under auspices of his Silent Film Concerts

production company presenting professional silent film screenings with piano, theatre organ, chamber ensemble, and full symphony orchestra accompaniments. Performing for films with orchestras since 1971 throughout the USA, Canada, Mexico, and Europe, James is renowned for providing the most comprehensive selection of authentic silent films with live music presentations available today.

James is also dedicated to furthering public interest in pipe organs and to the continuation of the theatrical traditions of organ performance. He began his career in the 1960s as House Organist for the Lansdowne and Brookline Theatres in Pennsylvania, plus adding the Paramount and Rivoli Theatres in Indiana during music degree studies at Indiana University. From 1975-89, James was the last appointed Resident Organist, a professional staff position for the Ohio Theatre in Columbus, and began serving three such professional appointments in 1999 (House Organist for Hollywood's El Capitan Theatre, House Organist for the Seattle Paramount Theatre, and Theatre Organist for the San Diego Symphony). James frequently performs at the Stanford Theatre in Palo Alto and California Theatre in San Jose as well as theatres throughout the West Coast between his international touring engagements.

James and Silent Film Concerts have amassed one of the largest private libraries of authentic silent film music in existence today, acquired via film musicians, film music collectors, and from historic theatres throughout the world. It includes complete original film scores plus hundreds of published generic silent film music compositions that are used to create historically accurate new musical scores where the originals do not survive. The resulting accompaniment performances are presented as historical recreations faithful to scoring practices of the period of each individual film's original release.

James' studies and personal associations with legendary veteran film organists Lee Erwin of New York, New York, Dr. C.A.J. Parmentier of New York, New York, Leonard MacLain of Philadelphia, Lowell Ayars of Bridgeton, New Jersey, Esther Higgins of

Collingswood, New Jersey, Gaylord Carter of Los Angeles, California, and Lloyd del Castillo of Los Angeles, California, led him to develop his now frequently-imitated authentic film accompaniment recreations incorporating actual period performance practices and utilizing the surviving musical source materials from the silent film era with unwavering commitment to stylistic integrity in performance.

James' professional colleagues have hailed his 50-year career dedicated to silent film music performance with such commentary as Peter Mintun, New York pianist and cultural historian: "Theatre organist Dennis M. James is one of the only living musicians who understands what is musically, historically, and cinematically appropriate for silent films. Dennis James' choice of music (some of which is original) subconsciously guides the listener into many moods, tension, bliss, excitement, despair, terror, and hilarity. He is able to accomplish this while remaining correct for the period of the film. In other words, if James's performance had been played when the film was first exhibited, it would have been considered contemporary. He would never attempt to modernize the feeling of the period by creating a score that would clash."

PROGRAM NOTES

Gustav Ludwig Wilhelm Hinrichs **Score to *The Phantom of the Opera*** **(1925 Silent Film)**

Born: December 10, 1850 in Grabow, Germany
Died: March 26, 1942 in Mountain Lakes, New Jersey
Composed: 1925
Premiered: September 6, 1925 in New York
Most recent Pacific Symphony performance: March 17, 2019 with Dennis James, organist



Directed by Rupert Julian
Starring Lon Chaney with Mary Philbin, Norman Kerry, and Arthur Edmund Carewe
Accompanying score edited and performed by Dennis James

"Silent films" were far from silent—especially in the case of *The Phantom of the Opera*, which has been

scaring movie audiences out of their wits for about 100 years. In addition to our own screams as we watch, this fabulous feature cries out for the kind of compelling musical accompaniment that organ virtuoso and film scholar Dennis James provides. The burden of silence was borne by the actors, who had to convey their characters' innermost emotions without speaking. How did they do it? "We had faces then," says silent star Norma Desmond in *Sunset Boulevard*. And Lon Chaney, star of this seminal version of *Phantom*, was "the man of a thousand faces."

Set mainly in the eerie, catacomb-like passageways of the Paris Opera, *Phantom* was conceived to showcase Chaney's unique talents as an actor and make-up artist. For early viewers, the film's horrific scenario and Chaney's ghastly appearance create an unprecedented experience in shared terror: Never before had so many people crowded together in dark theaters for the pleasure of being frightened. Yes, there were other examples of horror in cinema, notably the daringly surreal *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* and *Nosferatu*, the early vampire drama. But the combination of Gaston Leroux's 1908 novel *Le Fantôme de l'Opéra* and Lon Chaney's special skillset provided an opportunity for a more sensational movie experience, and those behind *Phantom's* creation at Universal Studios knew it.

The early signs for *The Phantom of the Opera* didn't augur well for its eventual success. There were numerous problems on set, delays during shooting, and troublesome re-edits. But the finished product was undeniably compelling, and for the buildup to its public premiere, the early Hollywood promotion machine shifted into high gear. At the center of the media storm was Chaney's innovative make-up artistry, which Universal managed to publicize in thousands of words while keeping its particulars a strict secret. The strategy was especially potent at a time of high public interest in carnival "freak shows" and biological anomalies that were dubbed "monsters."

Now, cut to 1926. *The Phantom of the Opera* played in all the major movie palaces, and when the villain's face was fully revealed in the film's climactic unmasking sequence, the response was pandemonium. Newspaper accounts of the film's first run describe women shrieking, children crying, and men leaving their seats "for a breath of air." Yet despite all the Hollywood craft and hype, this early dramatization of *Phantom* hews closer to Leroux's original story than subsequent adaptations for stage and screen. Chaney's appearance seems lifted from Leroux's pages, which describe the phantom's deformed face as skull-like and topped with thin, wispy hair.

From the beginning, the Hollywood dream purveyors understood the centrality of music to *Phantom's* impact. For 1925 previews in Los Angeles, a score for full orchestra (now lost) was prepared by successful Hollywood composer Joseph Carl Breil, a favorite of D.W. Griffith; but even with 60 instruments in the pit, an organ was employed to enhance the dramatic effect of the music. For the movie's official premiere in New York at the Astor Theatre, a full organ was installed in the auditorium at great expense. In these early showings, the organ's sepulchral power and haunting depth proved their special affinity for the horror genre.

"Considerable hard work is involved in terms of research, scoring, practice, and timing in order to create a musical accompaniment which is both appropriate and unobtrusive while enhancing both the action and the mood of what is taking place on the screen," notes organ soloist Dennis James. He is considered by many to be the foremost scholar and performer of silent movie musical accompaniment—the living embodiment of the photoplay music tradition. Practitioners of this art must combine enormous musical skill and flexibility with a sure-footed sense of cinematic drama.

To give us some idea of the scope of the enterprise, James cites a 1922 survey of American movie theaters by the industry publication *Motion Picture News*. He warns that the data are not ironclad; still, based on his best estimates, well over 20 percent of the moviegoing audience attended an orchestral score on any given night, with 250 theaters presenting orchestras larger than ten players. Well over 1,000 boasted ensembles of six to ten players. Even those numbers don't include the large majority of theaters, roughly seven out of ten, that used a theater organ or piano for movie accompaniment. Every one of these ensembles was tasked with expressing a full range of emotion—especially for the sophisticated, full-length features such as *Phantom*.

The Phantom of the Opera poses a special challenge for scorer and performer: In addition to the complexity of the plot, which teems with romantic incident and suggestions of the black arts, the story is rooted in specific music. Its setting is an actual opera house—the Palais Garnier, home of the Paris Opera—and the story is built around rehearsals and performances for the most popular opera of its day, Gounod's *Faust*. Opera lovers will take a special interest in hearing how James works many of the familiar melodies from *Faust* into his dramatic accompaniment.