

Alex Film Society  
in association with the Library of Congress, Glendale Arts  
and the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County presents  
Sunday, July 12, 2009 at 2 pm

# Mary Pickford

# SPARROWS

*Sparrows* (1926), Mary Pickford's penultimate silent film, is a Dickensian tale of mistreated orphans, complete with an evil caretaker and an alligator infested swamp. The film is famous for its highly stylized set design and atmospheric cinematography which was heavily influenced by cinema's German expressionist movement of the late 1920's. Pickford and her husband Douglas Fairbanks had visited Berlin the previous year, and both returned to the States to make films, influenced by what they had seen in Germany. Many consider this Pickford's best film, including her business partner and rival, Charlie Chaplin.

The baby farm where the children are trapped is isolated in the middle of a gothic swamp surrounded by misshapen trees, snaky vines, and sinister reptiles. The stunning sets were all created on the backlot of the Pickford-Fairbanks studio. Cameramen Charles Rosher and Karl Struss after completing *Sparrows*, were hired by German director F.W. Murnau to photograph his first American film, *Sunrise* (1927), and the villainous Mr. Grimes from *Sparrows* bears more than a passing resemblance to the vampire Count Orlok in Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1922).

The film also includes one of the most poignant moments in any Pickford film, when one of the boys leaves the baby farm, tiny



hands emerge from the rotten wooden walls to wave farewell. It reminds one of Chaplin's *The Kid* (1921).

*Sparrows* clearly influenced Charles Laughton's 1955 film, *Night of the Hunter*, which starred Robert Mitchum, as well as Pickford's childhood friend, Lillian Gish. Like *Sparrows*, *Night of the Hunter* is also the story of children finding safety from an evil man in the arms of a small, rather unassuming, but formidable woman.

In addition to the film itself, the Alex will also be showing the original trailer from *Sparrows*, one of only three Pickford trailers known to survive followed by an outtake reel from the film of Pickford and her crew working on a special effects shot that was processed and tinted, but ultimately not used in the film.

The print of *Sparrows* screening today was restored from an original tinted nitrate release print (what would have been shown in theaters in 1926) and a duplication negative made in 1965. The Library of Congress combined the best of these two film sources and used a copy of the continuity found in director William Beaudine's papers to make the reconstructed *Sparrows* as close as possible to its original release version. ■



## **THEY WOULD ELOPE and THE TRICK THAT FAILED**

Preceding the feature are two of the fifty-two films Mary Pickford made in 1909, her first year in the industry.

### **BOB MITCHELL**

96-year old Bob Mitchell first accompanied silent films as a youngster in 1924. After talkies arrived on the scene four years later, Bob began a second career as a men's and boy's choir director—a position he has held for over 80 years! Along the way, the "Robert Mitchell Choir Boys" appeared in over 100 films, including the 1944 Best Picture Winner, *Going My Way*, starring Bing Crosby. Bob and the Choir Boys were themselves the subject of a 1941 film entitled *40 Boys and a Song*, which was nominated for an Academy Award® for Best Documentary. Bob maintains an active schedule playing for churches and silent film festivals and screenings around the country. ■

This will be the first Los Angeles screening of these newly restored prints by the Library of Congress.

Both films are comedies, showcasing 16-year old Mary Pickford's talent as a comedienne. She had only been making movies for two months when *They Would Elope* was released, and yet her comedic talents are already well-developed. Her slow burn throughout this story of an elopement gone awry is much more effective than the wild gesticulating of her co-star, William A. Quirk.

When *The Trick That Failed* was made, women still did not have the right to vote, and yet that did not prevent Mary Pickford from promoting the idea of women's liberation through the surprising choices she makes in the movie. ■

## SPARROWS

Black and White – 1926 – 84 minutes  
 A United Artists Release  
 Produced by the Pickford Corporation  
 Restored print courtesy of the Library of Congress

Produced by .....Mary Pickford (uncredited)  
 Directed by .....William Beaudine  
 Story by .....Winifred Dunn  
 Adaptation by .....C. Gardner Sullivan  
 Titles by .....George Marion Jr.  
  
 Cinematographers .....Hal Mohr, Charles Rosher  
 .....& Karl Struss  
 Edited by .....Harold McLernon  
 Second Unit Director .....Tom McNamara  
 Set Decorator .....Harry Oliver (settings)  
 Collaborators .....Earle Browne, Carl Harbaugh  
 Electrical effects .....William Johnson

### Cast

Mary Pickford .....Molly  
 Roy Stewart .....Dennis Wayne  
 Mary Louise Miller .....Doris Wayne (the baby)  
 Gustave von Seyffertitz .....Mr. Grimes  
 Charlotte Mineau .....Mrs. Grimes  
 'Spec' O'Donnell .....Ambrose Grimes  
 Lloyd Whitlock .....Joe Bailey, alias Stone  
 Monty O'Grady .....Splutters  
 Billy Butts, Jack Lavine, Billy Jones .....the children  
 Muriel MacCormac, Florence Rogan  
 Mary Frances McLean, Sylvia Bernard,  
 Seeseell Ann & Camille Johnson



Mary posing with a hand cranked, wooden body, French built LeParvo camera. The attachment in front of the lens was used for the often seen "iris in" transition effect.

## MARY PICKFORD MEMORABILIA

Displayed in the lobby are artifacts from the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County's extensive motion picture collection including Mary Pickford's curls; the paste jewel encrusted headdress and prop curling iron from *Dorothy Vernon of Haddon Hall* (1924), and an exhibitor's herald from *Ramona* (1909) one of the 50 films Mary made during her first year in the industry.



## Coming Attractions

**Saturday, July 25, 2009 at 2 pm & 8 pm only**  
**RODGERS & HAMMERSTEIN'S' FABULOUS BROADWAY STAGE SUCCESS**  
**COMES TO THE SCREEN!**

### THE KING AND I

Musical comedy star Mary Martin suggested Yul Brynner for the part of the King in Rodgers and Hammerstein's 1951 adaptation of *Anna and the King of Siam*. When 20th Century Fox produced its lavish widescreen film version in 1956 it was Deborah Kerr who portrayed the English tutor in the blockbuster hit that garnered nine Academy Award® Nominations. Among its five wins was Best Actor for the man who created the part. Hit songs from the show include "Shall We Dance", "Getting To Know You" and "I Whistle a Happy Tune". **The King And I** is presented in glorious DeLuxe color and CinemaScope 55, don't miss this! (20th Century Fox, 1956)



**Saturday, September 19, 2009 at 8 pm only**  
**LIVE MAGIC, MAYHEM AND**  
**LAUGHS FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY!**

### VAUDEVILLE RETURNS!

#### 10TH ANNIVERSARY

VAUDEVILLE is One Big Night of Fun and Frolic! The most anticipated family event held annually at the grand theatre, the show is a "hurricane of fun and frolic" paying tribute to the Alex's vaudeville roots. The one-night-only event is an eclectic mix of the sort of variety acts that made vaudeville so beloved by a generation of fans. Learn what your great-grandma was talking about... This year our acts include: music by **The Night Blooming Jazzmen**; Mathemagician **Arthur Benjamin**; **Skip Banks** the Balloon Man; **Larry Cisewski**, World Champion Knife Thrower; and back by popular demand, **Chipper Lowell Experience!** True to the vaudeville genre, the evening concludes on the big screen with a classic comedy film and other short subjects. Don't miss it this year!

