

ushered in new methods, or if von Sternberg could have modified his pre-occupation with the camera and paid more attention to the development of his pictures' action, he might have achieved the greatness that was so nearly within his grasp.

However, to bewail what might have been does not alter what actually happened; but it is ironical to note that the successful partnership of Dietrich and von Sternberg in 'The Blue Angel' was never to be repeated. Dietrich became a "star" and ceased to act and von Sternberg directed her in a series of films, each one more glamorous and worthless than the last.

'The Blue Angel' was made before the diminution of the director's powers. It is based on the novel 'Professor Unrath' by Heinrich Hans Schneiberger [*aka Heinrich Mann - ed.*], very freely adapted by von Sternberg for the screen. He has plumped wholeheartedly for the frankly melodramatic and piles on the agony with a steady, albeit skilful, hand.

The finale is worthy of Grand Opera, I should say almost pure "Pagliacci", but instead of a demented Canio sobbing out "la comedia e finita", we are treated to the enlivening spectacle of the Professor, crowing like a cock whilst he squeezes the life out of the temptress who has destroyed his reason. So falls the curtain and we steal limply home.

Von Sternberg has exploited the situations with great skill and his settings are drearily oppressive with their gaudy trappings. There is no trace in this film of the dramatic atmosphere being interrupted by the probing and dwelling eye of the camera and the interplay of light and shadow on face and figure are minutely observed.

Emil Jannings as the Professor makes us forget the character is theatrical humbug and invests it with great poignancy, whilst Marlene, with one lazy movement of her body gets nearer to being an actress of importance than she ever subsequently became.

Charles Duranty



Plus:

As a contrast to inter-war Berlin.....

'MANHATTA' Directed by Paul Strand & Charles Wheeler.

[USA 1921; black & white; 10 minutes]

"Strand & Wheeler's famous representation of Walt Whitman's lyric hymn to the city. 'Manhatta' was the beginning of a brilliant career in cinematography for Strand, whose snappily drawn images for 'The Wave' (1935) and 'The Plow That Broke The Plains' (1936) are fine examples of his mature work." [Bfi publicity]

Biographies

[Taken from (i) *The Sunday Times* 1000 Makers of the Cinema and (ii) *Hollywood - 50 Great Years*]



One of the best guarded secrets of half a century was **Marlene Dietrich's** date of birth: it was December 27, 1901, the place was Berlin and her father was an officer in the Prussian police. She was well educated and studied under Max Reinhardt. She entered films and became quite successful in Germany during the 1920s. But she became an international star when Josef von Sternberg cast her as Lola Lola in *The Blue Angel* (1930), one of the most sexually provocative roles in the history of cinema. She was signed by Paramount, and dominated the early 1930s with a series of highly-charged, stunningly lit roles in Sternberg's films: *Morocco* (1930), *Dishonored* (1931), *Shanghai Express*, *Blonde Venus* (1932), *The Scarlet Empress* (1934) and *The Devil is a Woman* (1935). In the roles after Sternberg, she is always memorable (even in films like *Destry Rides Again*, 1939), but the magic was not as strong. Postwar, she registered strongly in *Stage Fright* (1950) and *Witness for the Prosecution* (1958). Her most recent film was *Just a Gigolo* (1978).

EMIL JANNINGS

Swiss actor (1884-1950)

In his time his range, gravity and power were unequalled by his contemporaries. Establishing himself in Max Reinhardt's Deutsches Theatre company in Berlin, he was encouraged by Ernst Lubitsch (qv) to try film, appearing in 27 silents, seven directed by Lubitsch. *Varieté* (25), in which he excelled as a jealous trapeze artist, was a success in America and he was signed to a three-year contract with Paramount. In Hollywood he starred in two tailor-made vehicles, *The Way of All Flesh* (27) and *The Last Command* (28), and became



the first actor to win an Oscar. In 1929 he starred opposite Marlene Dietrich (qv) in *The Blue Angel* (30), a talkie filmed in both German and English. While Dietrich went on to international stardom, Jannings, cursed by his poor command of English, remained in Germany. His subsequent films were poorly received when, in 1940, he was made head of the government-funded Ufa and appeared in propaganda films for the Nazis. Blacklisted by the allies, he retired to Austria in 1945.



JOSEF VON STERNBERG

US director (1894-69)

Rightly credited with creating Marlene Dietrich (qv) he pioneered the poetic film noir, using an imaginative interplay of light and shadow to create powerful atmospheric dramas. Sternberg was born in Vienna — the von was added to his credits allegedly without his knowledge as assistant director on *The Mystery of the Yellow Room* (19) — educated in Austria and America and worked as a film editor. After service in the first world war he was an assistant director before making *The Salvation Hunters* (25), his feature debut, which so impressed Chaplin (qv) that he hired him to make *The Sea Gull* (unreleased 26). The moody gangster film *Underworld* (27), *The Last Command* (28) and his first talkie *Thunderbolt* (29) led him to Germany to direct *The Blue Angel* (30). After six more magnificent films with Dietrich his career went into decline. An ambitious *I Claudius* (37) in Britain was never finished after its star Merle Oberon (qv) was injured in a car accident, but he made a magisterial return with *Anatahan* (52). He died of a heart attack after writing his autobiography *Fun* in a Chinese Laundry.

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