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Berlinale Classics 2018 Presents Das alte Gesetz (The Ancient Law) by E.A. Dupont

Description

Posted by Larry Gleeson

World Premiere of the Digitally Restored Version

As part of the *Berlinale Classics* program, the 68th Berlin International Film Festival will be presenting Ewald AndrÃ© Dupontâ??s silent *Das alte Gesetz (The Ancient Law,* Germany, 1923) as a special screening with live music. The film, digitally restored under the auspices of the Deutsche Kinemathek, and accompanied by new music by French composer Philippe Schoeller, will have its world premiere on February 16, 2018 in the Friedrichstadt-Palast.

Das alte Gesetz (The Ancient Law) is an important piece of German-Jewish cinematic history; it contrasts the closed world of an Eastern European shtetl with the liberal mores of 1860s Vienna, and tackles the issue of the assimilation of Jews in 19th century Europe.

The Deutsche Kinemathek undertook the first efforts at reconstructing the film in 1984, trying to get as close to the original version as possible, as far as the sources available at the time allowed. When the original censorâ??s certificate was later uncovered, containing the text of the title cards, it would eventually provide the impetus for renewed research efforts world-wide and finally for a new, digital restoration.

â??With its authentic set design and an excellent ensemble of actors, all captured magnificently by cinematographer Theodor Sparkuhl, *The Ancient Law* is an outstanding example of the creativity of Jewish filmmakers in 1920s Germanyâ?•, says Rainer Rother, head of the *Retrospective* section and

artistic director of the Deutsche Kinemathek â?? Museum fÃ¼r Film und Fernsehen.

The new music by Philippe Schoeller was commissioned by the broadcasters ZDF/ARTE. Schoeller gets to the heart of the film with meticulously composed ensemble music that employs all the techniques of a modern soundtrack. It consciously establishes some historical distance to the film itself and uses a tapestry of translucid sounds to emphasise the visual excellence of the silent classic. The composition will be performed by the Orchester Jakobsplatz MÃ¼nchen, with Daniel Grossmann at the podium. The orchestra, founded in 2005, focuses on the work of Jewish composers, as well as 20th and 21st century music, making an important contribution to contemporary German-Jewish culture. Its most recent guest appearance at the Berlinale was in 2013.

The new restoration drew upon nitrate prints in five different languages found in archives in Europe and the US. The text of the original German title cards was long thought lost. It was not until the censorâ??s certificate listing the intertitles was unearthed that the restoration team from the Deutsche Kinemathek could accurately reconstruct them, as well as correcting and finalising the editing. The colour concept was based primarily on two found prints nearly identical in their colourisation. So this is the first time that a version corresponding to the 1920s German theatrical release will be shown, both in its original length, and with the colourisation digitally restored.

The Berlinale screening marks the start of the filmâ??s tour to several cities, mainly in Eastern Europe, that were once hubs of Jewish life, including Vilnius, Budapest, Warsaw, and Vienna. It will also be shown at the Silent Film Festival in San Francisco.

The restored version will debut on television on February 19, 2018 on the ARTE channel. Simultaneously, absolut MEDIEN will release a DVD as part of its ARTE EDITION series, containing a wealth of bonus material on the restoration process.

The Deutsche Kinemathekâ??s digital restoration of *Das alte Gesetz (The Ancient Law)* was made possible through the personal commitment of professor Cynthia Walk (University of California, San Diego), and generous support from the Sunrise Foundation for Education and the Arts.

The world premiere of the digitally restored version in Berlin is a cooperative venture between the Berlin International Film Festival, the Deutsche Kinemathek, and public broadcaster ZDF in cooperation with ARTE.

(Berlin Press Office)

Category

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