

## Press Release



### **Berlinale Retrospective 2007: City Girls. Images of Women in Silent Film**

A bobbed hairdo, a bold gaze and confident manner, plus an active working life, all stereotyped the image of women whose myth persists in the term "New Woman". This shift in the role of women in society is also the expression of political upheaval and social changes at the beginning of the 20th century. The **Retrospective** of the 57th Berlin International Film Festival – "City Girls. Images of Women in Silent Film" – reflects the portrayal of this new type of woman on the screen.

"The 'little shopgirls' who belonged to the salaried masses mentioned by Siegfried Kracauer, were a new social phenomenon – although their existence was by no means more secure than that of their blue-collar counterparts. True, for the most part, the cinema romanticized their lives; nonetheless, it focused on them with astonishing frequency. The films promised a blissful marriage with a wealthy man – while also depicting day-to-day life prior to the inevitable happy end", comments Dr. Rainer Rother, head of the **Retrospective** and artistic director of the Deutsche Kinemathek – Museum für Film und Fernsehen.

The setting of such female independence, mobility and libertinage is the big city. In its bright lights, these early films reflect different forms of changing values. Through the cinema, role models and clichés of the "New Woman" spread quickly: the demonic seductress of the turn of the century gradually gives way to the jaunty looking modern girl. An Eton crop, narrow hips and a flat chest are en vogue; ladies' choice and Charleston, à la mode. Flappers flirt to the rhythms of jazz – the city girl takes over screens.

The **Retrospective** will present a total of thirty silent film programs under the subheadings "Working Girls", "Flaming Youth", "Husbands and Wives", and "Fate and Passion". In the films of "Working Girls", popular actresses slip into the roles of young salesgirls or office girls: Norma Talmadge is **The Social Secretary** (John Emerson, USA 1916); Clara Bow, the **It-Girl** (Clarence Badger, USA 1926/27) with that certain something. A radiant lightheartedness – "Flaming Youth" – is the theme of many films of the silent era: in Ernst Lubitsch's turbulent comedy **I Don't Want to Be a Man** (Germany 1918), Ossi Oswalda couldn't care less about social conventions and is just as impulsively capricious as are the two British serial heroines Alma Taylor and Chrissie White in **Tilly's Party** (Lewin Fitzhamon, 1911). Yet these changes in society and its role models upset things between the sexes ("Husbands and Wives"), as Lyudmila Semyonova experiences in Abram Room's social study **Tretya Meshchanskaya (Bed and Sofa)**, USSR 1927) and Astrid Holm in Carl Theodor Dreyer's drama about a marriage **Du skal ære din hustru (Master of the House)**, Denmark 1925).

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City girls don't like being pinned down. They enjoy trying out new modes of conduct and casting off old ones. They are seductive, smart and, glamorous – yet they are still surrounded by the tragedy and decadence of the fin de siècle, like Nina Chernova in Yevgeni Bauer's *Sumerki zenskoj dushi* (*Twilight of a Woman's Soul*, Russia 1913) and Francesca Bertini in *Assunta Spina* (Gustavo Serena, Italy 1914). "Fate and Passion" are their coordinates and create their aura of mystery on the screen. But dreams of self-determination also have their limits, as can be seen in many silent films, for instance, Mikio Naruse's melodrama *Yogoto no yume* (*Every Night Dreams*, Japan 1933).

"On screens worldwide, the silent era propagated a new type of woman, one which still stands for modernity. In today's debate of gender roles, many parallels can be drawn to the discussion of emancipation in this era", says Berlinale director Dieter Kosslick.

The films of the *Retrospective* will be shown at the CinemaxX on Potsdamer Platz and at the Zeughauskino. The book "City Girls. Frauenbilder im Stummfilm" with essays on cultural and film history written by Daniela Sannwald, Annette Brauerhoch, Heike-Melba Fendel and Fabienne Liptay, as well as the journal "FilmHeft 11" which documents the films of the *Retrospective* with contemporary reviews (in German and English) and in-depth filmographic information are being published by Bertz + Fischer in Berlin. The Deutsche Kinemathek – Museum für Film und Fernsehen are in charge of the *Retrospective* and the accompanying publications. To complement the film program, the Deutsche Kinemathek is also organizing a series of lectures and discussions.

Press Office  
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