D.W. Griffith's

ORPHANS OF THE STORM

STARRING
LILLIAN and DOROTHY GISH

with
MONTE BLUE
JOSEPH SCHILDKRAUT
stories with all their details could have been kept so clearly in the head
of one man who worked without the help of a single note.

Little poems or stirring dramas - "The Romance of Happy Valley", "Broken
Blossoms", "Hearts of the World", "Way Down East" and "Orphans of the
Storm" - were all monuments that he left to point the way for others who
might care enough to fight to make their dreams articulate on film. May
their gratitude to a loving, patient mentor reach him.

I know how deeply David Griffith believed in the goodness of the human
family - how sincere was his desire to bring peace to a confused and
tortured world.

(Lillian Gish)

Program Notes & Enquiries:
William K. Everson, Manhattan Towers Hotel, 2166 Broadway, New York City 24

Committee:
Dorothy Lovell (art work); Edward Gorey; Charles Shubik.

COMING PROGRAMS:

The first program in June (on the 17th) will be devoted to Ronald Colman,
who died this week. "The Prisoner of Zenda", one of the most typical and
one of the most enjoyable, of all Colman talkies, will be shown complete.
It hasn't been seen in New York for some years, and hasn't yet turned up
on television. Still one of the best films of its type, it has Madeleine
Carroll, Douglas Fairbanks jr., Raymond Massey, Mary Astor, David Niven,
C. Aubrey Smith and Montague Love playing with Colman. The balance of
the program will consist of excerpts from both silent and sound Colman
films, including "Lost Horizon", "Night of Love", "Lady Windermere's Fan",
"Beau Geste", etc.

The second (and possibly a third) June show will be announced in our
June news bulletin.
"ORPHANS OF THE STORM"

(1921)

Produced and Directed By

DAVID WARK GRIFFITH

Photographed by Hendrik Sartov and Paul Allen. Sets designed by Charles N. Kirk. Cutters (originally listed under the credit "Assembly") James and Rose Smith. Assistant director: Herbert Sutcher. Adapted by arrangement with Kate Claxton, from the Palmer-Jackson version of the play "The Two Orphans" by D'Emnery and Corman.

The Cast

Henriette Girard (LILLIAN GISH); Louise (DOROTHY GISH); The Chevalier de Vaudrey (Joseph Schildkraut); Danton (Monte Blue); The Count de Linieres (Frank Losee); The Countess de Linieres (Catherine Emmett); The Marquis de Praille (Morgan Wallace); Mother Frochard (Lucille La Verne); Jacques Frochard (Sheldon Lewis); Pierre Frochard (Frank Puglia); Picard (Creighton Hale); Jacques Forget-Not (Leslie King); Robespierre (Sidney Herbert); King Louis XVI (Leo Kolmar); The Doctor (Adolphe Lessina); Sister Genevieve (Kate Bruce); Starving peasant (Flora Finch); Executioner (Louis Wolheim); The Chevalier as a boy (Kenny Delmar).

When "ORPHANS OF THE STORM" had a grand-scale premiere at the Apollo Theatre in New York in January 1922, Arthur James, editor in chief of The Moving Picture World went overboard with an unprecedented full-page editorial rave (which was quite separate from the publication's equally enthusiastic regular review). Headed "MR. GRIFFITH RISES TO A DIZZY HEIGHT", the editorial said (in part) ....

"It is a triumph for D.W. Griffith to eclipse his own great productions which led the screen into new and finer realms, but with this picture he has succeeded in doing it. No more gorgeous thing has ever been offered on the screen. It has motion within motion, action upon action, and it builds up to crashing climaxes with all that superb definition which makes Mr. Griffith first and always the showman. No man of the stage or screen understands so well the art of exquisite torture for his spectators. He takes their heartstrings, one by one, then stretches them out until they are about to snap, ties little bowknots in them, and finally seizes them by handfuls and twists them until they quiver in agony. Then he applies myrrh and aloes and sweet inguents and sends the spectators away happy in the memory of attractive sufferings that they can never forget.

His detail is perfection, and its grandeur is the sum total of many perfections .... Miss Lillian Gish and Miss Dorothy Gish are beyond praise... its massed scenes surpass the greater of the European spectacles thus far of record".

The rest of the press responded with like enthusiasm. The Motion Picture News stated "The standard bearer of the celluloid drama has again demonstrated that he has no superior as a painter of rich and panoramic canvasses", while
the Exhibitors Trade Review remarked: "A great work of art. It has the sweep of "The Birth of a Nation", the remarkable tragic drive of "Broken Blossoms", the terrific melodramatic appeal of "Way Down East", and a warning written in fire and spoken in thunder for all Americans to heed".

* The warning referred to is the film's pronounced and repeated anti-Communist message, which we'll refer to in more detail later.

Griffith appeared at the premiere, and spoke at some length to the audience. Lillian and Dorothy Gish, seated in a proscenium box, also greeted the audience, and Lillian made a brief speech following the screening. It was a gala affair, but a good deal of its thunder was stolen by Universal's ballyhoo for von Stroheim's "Poulhcih Wives". This had received so much exploitation during the preceding months, and had already earned a certain notoriety even ahead of the preview, so that it was very much the film event of the month. Its premiere, attended by scores of notables, was set for a week after that of "Orphans of the Storm", and it drew most of the limelight. After the premiere, the Moving Picture World's editor also devoted a full-page editorial to it, but hardly in the same enthusiastic terms. In fact, editor James, while finding much that was praise-worthy in the film, wound up a generally outraged editorial by suggesting that Carl Laemmle either shoot Stroheim, or at the very least, squash him.

Coincident with Griffith's premiere, First National suddenly released an Italian version of "The Two Orphans". With brazen effrontery, they pointed out to exhibitors that audiences were clamoring for this type of film, and they even had the nerve to bill it as "The production with a million dollars' worth of publicity behind it".

While it did well, "Orphans of the Storm" was not the boxoffice blockbuster that Griffith expected -- and needed (for reasons that we'll go into later). Because it was thus not a financial landmark, nor an aesthetic advance on previous Griffith films, it is usually dismissed far too casually by most historians (even the few responsible ones) as representing "Griffith in the decline" -- a most unfair and inaccurate generalization.

The "decline" of Griffith has been dated from any number of periods, depending on the "historian", his knowledge of film, and, most influential of all, his dislike of Griffith. Some historians would even have you believe that the "decline" set in somewhere around "A Corner in Wheat" (1909), although when you try to pin them down as to whether it was before or after the main title of that film, they grow a little vague. Decline there inevitably was, but it was brought about through Griffith (much later in the 20's) having to sacrifice his independence and work in the studios as a contract director. (Of course, all film-makers tend to decline in their later years anyway; certainly neither Chaplin nor Dreyer have been forced to adapt themselves to studio requirements. Yet, even having retained their freedom, their later work has been of somewhat less interest than their earlier work.)

At worst, "Orphans of the Storm" can be said to represent Griffith the Artist-Showman, rather than Griffith the Artist-Innovator. Here the old maestro was out primarily to make a good picture than was also a money
pictures but one that was backed by all the cinema mastery and sheer knowhow that he had acquired in the preceding years. If there are no new innovations, the old ones are re-employed, polished up, and developed.

The fast, rhythmic cutting in the bacchanal sequence, as the prisoners are released from the Bastille, is one of the finest episodes ever created by Griffith - a tremendously exciting and powerful sequence that is certainly superior to (quoting just one example) the more famous machine-gun sequence in the much later "October" - a dazzling sequence, but a mechanical and contrived one. Its fast cutting was functionally creative, in that it intensified the emotions of the spectator, but it was dramatically far less honest than the cutting of Griffith's Bacchanal. And if the climactic mob scenes and the race of Danton's troops through the streets seem to be a repetition of the climax of "The Birth of a Nation", what wonderful repetition it is! Dwarfed only by "Intolerance" itself, "Orphans of the Storm" is probably Griffith's biggest spectacle, with the vast sets, the huge mobs and the spectacular surge of action all representing Griffith at his peak.

Magnificently composed shots, flawless camerawork throughout, some of the best "penel" shots Griffith ever devised ... this was the work of Hendrik Sartov (possibly the finest cameraman Griffith ever utilised) and Paul Allen. Bitzer was initially employed on the film too, but through his perpetual drunkenness, and his dislike of Sartov, he became difficult to manage, and was dismissed fairly early in the proceedings.

The story of "The Two Orphans" is based on course on the old stage success "The Two Orphans". In this country Kate Claxton, and later Grace George, played in it extensively. (In the stage version, one player always enacted both roles, the two orphans being separated except for short scenes at beginning and end, when a double would take over). The story has seen yeoman service on the screen, under its original title, in both silent and sound eras, the Italians probably having done the most. It is a melodramatic tale, relying to a great degree on audience acceptance of rather improbable coincidences. Griffith, no doubt realising this; and also realising that it was pretty trivial stuff as originally conceived, re-shaped it considerably - to the extent of dumping the whole thing bodily into the French Revolution (which formed no part of the original at all!). Having made this decision, Griffith as usual went the whole hog, re-creating many actual events, characters, and introducing his beloved "historical facsimiles". Such authorities as Louis Allard, Professor of French at Harvard University and the Marquis de Tolignac, of Paris were consulted, as were the works of such noted historians as Taine, Guizot and Abbott. Thomas Carlyle's History of the French Revolution was, however, the "Bible" of the whole venture.

Lillian Gish remarked recently that every important member of the cast had a copy of it, and read it inside and out until they were really imbued with the proper sense of period. Another work that Griffith went to a great deal was Dickens' "A Tale of Two Cities". In fact, several reviews of the time added an erroneous credit to the extent of saying that Griffith's film was "based on the novel by Dickens". Dickens was a great personal friend of Carlyle, and drew most of his research material from him - including the incident of the Marquis' carriage killing the child, and his enquiry as to the welfare of the horses. This incident, used by Dickens in "A Tale of Two Cities" (as well as by Griffith in "Orphans") was picked up by MGM in their version of "A Tale of Two Cities", and obviously modelled on Griffith's handling of it.
Dickens' peculiarly cinematic style, with parallel plots and a form of cross-cutting, had always fascinated Griffith. He admitted Dickens' influence quite openly. This influence, incidentally, affected not only the dramatic structure of Griffith's films, but also the dramatic content. For example, the delightful "True Heart Susie" is a thinly-disguised borrowing from one aspect of "David Copperfield". It may have been this ingrained Dickens flavor in so many of the Griffith films that caused him to be dismissed by so many as being Victorian and old-fashioned. Moments of "Orphans of the Storm" do, possibly, seem a little quaint because of this flavor. For example, Griffith seems less worried about Lillian Gish being unjustly thrown into prison than he is by "the Greater Injustice" which has Lillian sent to the prison for fallen women, and incarcerated with a weird assortment of prostitutes and dope fiends. (There is a delightful moment later in the film when Robespierre reminds her of this prison sentence; as Sartorius catches her in a lovely and innocent closeup, Lillian admits it and says, in title, "Yes monsieur - but I was not guilty"). However, there is a very real difference between injecting true Victorian flavor (which Griffith did) and propagating Victorian mores (which he decidedly did not). "Way Down East" might be considered a Victorian story - but recall the outcome: The religious, God-fearing farmer at the end begs forgiveness for his behavior. And the callous seducer goes unpunished.

It's odd that "Orphans of the Storm" should often be called "old fashioned", while such accusations are never laid against "The Hunchback of Notre Dame" and "Romola". "The Hunchback of Notre Dame" was a good, if stilted film, while "Romola" was visually superb but dramatically mediocre. Both had Dickensian plots, and structures that would have delighted Griffith - parallel plots, class conflicts, personal stories involved in turbulent historical backgrounds. What both films lacked were sweep, the real surge of history, and (Panay's performance excepted) life-size emotion. Griffith could have worked wonders with both films. "Romola" especially, needed Griffith badly.

Griffith's detractors who assail the film for being out-of-date are of course stumped when confronted with the film's political angle, and thus choose to ignore it completely. Griffith has never made any secret of his feelings against "kingly tyrannies", and "Orphans of the Storm" provided him with a fine opportunity to let off steam not only in that direction, but also against something that he felt even more strongly about - Bolshevism. Griffith's original synopsis for the film read, in part:

"... scenes are shown of the exaggerated luxury of those last days of the tottering omnipotence of the monarchy. The orgies and tyrannies of a section of the old French aristocracy is shown as it affects the common people ... Then comes the rolling of "Ca-Ira", the crashing of the Marseillaise, and the madness which we now call Bolshevism. "Orphans of the Storm" is great anti-Bolshevism propaganda. It shows, more vividly than any book of history can tell, that the tyranny of kings and nobles is hard to bear, but that the tyranny of the maddened mob under blood-lusting rulers is intolerable".

Opening titles to the film are climaxed by this still very timely line:
"... we in the United States with a democratic government should beware lest we mistake traitors and fanatics for patriots, and replace law and order with anarchy and bolshevism".
Later in 1922, Griffith, referring to Robespierre's Committee of Public Safety, stated: "Robespierre used it as a weapon for destroying all who do not think as he does. This condition was not unlike that in Russia today. Some may see in it a lesson for our own people . . . ."

Incidentally, every large-scale upheaval or civil war seems to have had a "Committee of Public Safety" involved in it somewhere. There was such a committee involved in the Revolutionary War too, as recorded by Griffith in "America".

As with all of Griffith's historical epics, every effort is made to document the facts and episodes presented. Thus any errors are usually deliberate errors of omission. For example, one gets the impression at the end of the film that the Revolution is all but over, and since Danton is one of the heroes of the film, no mention is made of his own subsequent execution. When Lillian is rescued from the guillotine in reel 12, the scores of other poor aristocrats are given a convenient iris-out, and the fact that the reign of terror is still very much in progress is somehow lost! But for the most part, the film remains remarkably factual -- even to details. During the carnival orgy scene, the original musical score for the film featured "Ca Ira", the frenzied tine sung by the Paris hoodlums of the time. (The score was arranged by Albert Pesce.) Griffith also makes a point of stressing Robespierre's effeminate, mincing walk. (D.W. terms him "The original pussy-footers")! Of the dresses and costumes, Griffith wrote in the original program: "While many of the costumes, particularly those of the women, may seem strange to our eyes, they are proper duplications of costumes of the period."

Like all of the big Griffith films, "Orphans of the Storm" was shot without any scenario -- but rehearsed carefully in advance. Lillian Gish mentioned recently that most of the rehearsals took place in the New York theatre still housing the successful run of "Way Down East" -- and that the only written word that they referred to was Carlyle's history. Much of the dialogue that they came up with in the course of these rehearsals was remembered, and later incorporated into the titles of the film.

"Way Down East", which came out in 1920, was literally a life-saver for Griffith at this time. The overhead from the new Kamaroneck studios was enormous, especially for a producer making as few films as Griffith. Barthelmess had been on salary for a long time after his last work for Griffith, until he finally left to form his own company. "Dream Street", a very pretentious pseudo-"Broken Blossoms", was not doing at all well for Griffith, and receipts were negligible. (Strangely, despite its "arty" flavor, "Dream Street" was well liked by exhibitors, if not by their audiences. It didn't stand up too well today, unfortunately.) The receipts from "Way Down East" HAD to support Griffith, maintain his studio, and help pay for "Orphans of the Storm" too. Because of this, and because it was such a popular film, Griffith hiked up the rentals on it, and lost a little good will with the exhibition field, which may account (to a degree) for the disappointing returns on "Orphans of the Storm".)
However, other factors were involved too. Audiences in the early 20's were beginning to get cynical, jaded, caught up in the superficial, jazzy tempo of the times. And they wanted films that reflected those times. Films like "Orphans of the Storm" that reflected what are loosely termed "the old values" were considered far more out of date than they would be even today. By 1922 this attitude was only just beginning, but by 1924 it was in full bloom, and thus had no time at all for Griffith's sincere patriotism with "America". Ironically, the very people who, on paper, and in theory, urged Griffith to make "America" (The Daughters of the American Revolution, etc.) were the ones who betrayed him, by failing to support it when it was made, and turning instead to the slick jazz comedies of the day -- something that Griffith himself was compelled to make himself in time, just to keep active -- but not before one last grand, disastrous, and wonderful essay in real film-making with "Isn't Life Wonderful?".

Another factor contributing to the generally disappointing returns on the film was (probably) the lack of a really strong and popular male star. Initially Griffith had planned to use Barthelmess as the Chevalier, and though he might have been less satisfactory visually and physically, he would almost certainly have enhanced the film's boxoffice draw. While Joseph Schildkraut is fine, he certainly lacks the virility and sincerity that Dick Barthelmess would have brought to the role. Dorothy Gish, who is a shrewd observer, and who once characterised Thomas Ince as "the original Sonny Tufts of the movies", pointed out that, especially with the French period makeup, Schildkraut bore an uncanny resemblance to Priscilla Dean throughout the film, "and in the love scenes with Henriette, looked prettier than she did!"

Incidentally, when we screened the film with Lillian and Dorothy Gish a few weeks ago, they pointed out a number of members of the Griffith crew playing extra roles in the film. Herbert Sutch, Griffith's assistant director, is the large and jovial lackey carving the meat at the Marquis' fête. And the cutters, James and Rose Smith, are among the dancers at the fête, she wearing a large black hat. Lillian Gish also pointed out at least two of her cousins, one of them on the swing at the fête, the other standing by the water's edge in that lovely shot of the stagecoach rumbling along by the side of a river. Those of you who know the Mamaroneck area will spot several familiar locations, and Long Island sound can be seen in one or two shots. All of the big Paris sets were of course, reconstructed entirely in the Mamaroneck studio.

If there is one serious criticism one can level against "Orphans of the Storm", it is the obtrusive comedy of Creighton Hale. Griffith was never too much of a humorist, but he did have the dramatic sense of knowing just where a joke or bit of comedy business could relieve tension. He inserted one or two such scenes, at just the right place, in "The Birth of a Nation" and "America". But here there is an attempt to inject comedy relief for its own sake, and while there is still no excess of it, it tends to come at JUST the wrong time. It is particularly unfortunate that some low comedy routines with Hale are placed right smack in the middle of the tense and exciting scenes of the rescue from the Bastille. And they are so intricately intercut with other action that it is well nigh impossible to edit them out -- even if one had the right to do so.

However, one can readily overlook such a minor flaw in such an overpowering work. "Orphans of the Storm" was of marked influence on the European
spectacles that followed it, notably French and German, and also, to a lesser degree, on the Russian cinema. The famous use of what Seymour Stern has termed "Symbolic Space" when Griffith, to show omnipotent power, shows the Committee of Safety (photographed from above) in the center of a huge, sold room, was copied intact by Eisenstein, to show Kerensky installing himself in the Winter Palace. (This symbolic shot was actually first used by Griffith in "Intolerance", to stress the aloof and tyrannical power of the industrialist played by Sam de Grasse). Not only Eisenstein but also Pudovkin seem to have taken note of "Orphans of the Storm", for his "The End of St. Petersburg" contains shots of the Royal Palace interiors obviously copied from those scenes at the beginning of "Orphans of the Storm" wherein Griffith's camera pans over the fantastically elegant walls of the Marble Court at Versailles.

Certainly few spectacles have ever been as sumptuous as "Orphans of the Storm", and it is a pity that we cannot see it in all the richness of its original prints, with the marvelous tones and tints. However, the tints excepted, our print is an exceptionally fine one, and every dollar that Griffith spent on the production really shows up on the screen. For the record, Griffith's publicity at the time pointed out that even the liquor in the Fountain of Wine at the festival was the real stuff -- thanks to special arrangements with the prohibition authorities.

Incidentally, it is a matter of some interest that this is the only Griffith historical spectacle without a villain. Robespierre and Jacques Forget-Not fulfill all the functions of villainy, but because their villainy has political and emotional, rather than solely personal, roots, Griffith tends to play down their melodramatics, and lets them go unpunished at the end -- save for a title referring to Robespierre's own eventual execution. The lecherous Marquis who, "inflamed by Henriette's virginal beauty" kidnaps her and thus separates the two orphans, is of course a heavy in the good old Walter Long sense, but his main value is as a plot motivator. Similarly with Sheldon Lewis, and wonderful Lucille La Verne, who give a couple of great barnstorming performances, but who also go unpunished at the end. (Lucille's voice matched her appearance perfectly, and it's a pity she didn't have a comparable role in talkies. However, who can forget her as the voice of the Witch in "Snow White"?)

Sheldon Lewis, in his eighties, died only last week. Dedicated to villainy ("Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde", "The Monster Walks") through most of his career, his performance here was his best remembered.

Catherine Emmett, playing the mother of Louise, is still quite active on television. A grand, sturdy old lady, she is still a fine actress. Recently she was offered a role in "Sunrise at Campobello", but declined, feeling a long-run play would now be too strenuous for her.

Despite its tremendous spectacular values, the film was sold and advertised as much as a love story as an epic. One typical catchline described it as "An empire of new emotion". Of the film's cost, Griffith wrote, presumably as a blurb for programs, "This production is the most costly of all our efforts both in money and time. This should mean nothing as long as it pleases the public -- whose servant we are".

We have devoted most of our space to Griffith and to the film itself because it is undoubtedly more notable as a Griffith than as a Gish film. This is not to denigrate the lovely and sensitive performances of Lillian and Dorothy Gish. However, as opposed to "Way Down East" (and even "Hearts of the World")
acting opportunities are somewhat submerged by the surge of melodrama. Sheer "trouping", the maintenance of astonishing physical stamina, and the ability to look lovely at all times, these are the main requirements of the roles of the orphans. When a chance arises for sensitivity, or for high powered acting, it is seized with both hands = by both girls = and played magnificently. Especially memorable are the gracefully played scenes of the orphans' departure for Paris, a charming little episode, with some particularly lovely close-ups, and the still heart-rending scenes in the final two reels, when the girls meet again at Henriette's trial, and are separated on the way to the guillotine. These are superbly acted sequences. Another whale of a sequence is the re-union that doesn't come off, with Henriette about to rejoin her sister at the mid-way point. Even Griffith never milked a situation for quite so much suspense as he did this one; in fact both Miss Lillian and Miss Dorothy are still of the opinion that this sequence was a little overdone. Actually, in normal context, it certainly would have been. Since it came immediately before the intermission however, it must have provided a real sock finish to the first half of the film.

Dorothy goes through the mill in this one much as Lillian did in "Broken Blossoms", and has some quite harrowing scenes in a dingy cellar filled with rats = a sequence that couldn't have been too much fun to film. She recalls with some sorrow that the toughest shots to film = close-ups of rats crawling over her feet = were later cut by D. W. as being just a shade too unpleasant. Dorothy's delightful sense of comedy isn't, by the nature of things, given too much leeway in "Orphans", but there is an amusing final scene which is a welcome reminder of what an able comedienne Dorothy was.

Since we are concluding our program with a tape recording of Erich von Stroheim's tribute to Griffith, as broadcast in London in 1948, it is only appropriate that we also present Lillian Gish's tribute to D. W. as it appeared in "The Screen Writer" of August, 1948:

He taught us that we were taking the first tiny steps in a glorious new medium that had been predicted in the Bible. He called it the "universal language". He believed that when it could be brought to its full power it would bring about the millennium since it could break down the barriers that so many other languages create. And he believed that, if properly used, it could bring peace to all people. So he wrote on celluloid a new formula to cure the ills of the world. His record in this new medium is there for all to see in the films he made from 1906 to 1912. (***)

(***) There is a slight, possibly typographic error here, in that the first date should of course be 1908.

It is strange that he, who loved the written and spoken word so dearly, should have created a new art without ever putting a word on paper. Never, during the time I was with him, did I see him work from a script of any kind.

I can still hear his indignant cry on reading that "The Birth of a Nation" was full of race prejudice. He said that such critics had not seen the picture for otherwise, they would have known that the colored man when bad had been made so by the white man. He had been raised by the colored people and loved and understood them. The story of that film concerned individuals, not a race. In that hour of critical attack, the idea for his favorite film, "Intolerance", was born. As I look again at this picture, I wonder how its four intricate