

# THE 5TH HIPPODROME FESTIVAL OF SILENT CINEMA

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WEDNESDAY 18TH MARCH - SUNDAY 22ND MARCH 2015

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Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> March | 13:30

Goethe-Institut Glasgow presents

## Children of No Importance (Die Unehelichen)

Dir: Gerhard Lamprecht | Germany | 1926 | 1h 35m  
With: Ralph Ludwig, Fee Wachsmuth, Margot Misch  
Accompanied live by Richard Siedhoff

Gerhard Lamprecht (1897 – 1974), a passionate filmgoer and film collector from boyhood on, participated in nearly 70 films in the capacities of actor, screenwriter and director. He dealt in many genres, but it is his films of Berlin that rise above the others. Despite the political changes that led from the Weimar Republic to the National Socialist dictatorship and to the two differently oriented post war German states, Lamprecht's work retained continuity.

Human suffering is the focus of many of his films; he intended his audiences to sympathise with his protagonists and to make the world better through the jointly experienced suffering, or at least to give a little push in that direction. "Curiosity and human interest" were what motivated him, Lamprecht once said.

It was the "sensations" of everyday life upon which Lamprecht was fixated and which he traced in almost ethnographic terms in his films. He avoided conventional cinematic effects. He made films driven by a documentary interest in the world and an insistence in finding true observation of the essence of reality in the apparently trivial or mundane. Lamprecht was not only an observer interested in humanity, he was an observer endowed with humanity.

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The story of the film 'Die Unehelichen', produced in 1926, is based on an official report of the Association for the Protection of Children against Exploitation and Abuse. Lamprecht's affection for children can be seen in many of his films. "It's unheard-of what he gets out of the children," enthused one critic, continuing: "Never, not even in America, the land of child stars has a film director immersed himself so lovingly in the psyche of the child and created so lovingly from it. These children move with such naturalness that one can here speak of a transfiguration, that psychological process in which the actor is completely possessed by the figure being played, a grace that can belong only to the most naïve or to the most sensitive people, and which one has seen so far in films to the greatest effect in Jackie Coogan and Asta Nielsen."

A summary of the film's plot may read like naïve pulp fiction, and yet it was very near to the director's heart. Lamprecht said that he came upon the material because his mother's house, and especially her kitchen, was always full of little children. The family lived in a typical Berlin neighbourhood, and the children were always hungry. Apart from that, he learned from his parents "very early on, that life is not the way one read about it in children's books. Rather, I learned to know realism, and my clever parents, especially my mother, gave me answers about this early on. If I read stories or novels in which the bad, rather than the good, won, then I was told, yes, that's what life is like, one has to get used to it. Good is not always rewarded – and that left its mark already very early."

"Often, in my films, this children's world still came through, and I then was happy to do what I could in order to feel something like compensatory justice." In this way films became for Lamprecht a social corrective, a means "of exposing the social damages of our age".

Lamprecht had begun to build up a film archive. He cultivated and indexed the precious material at a time when resources for film studies did not yet exist. His standard film prints and original negatives did not survive the war. What did survive were the 16mm reversal prints he had had made from 1935 onwards. In 1962, the State of Berlin acquired the "Kinemathek Lamprecht", the history of this once private collection continues to this day as a publicly available resource: the "Deutsche Kinemathek".

Abbreviated article by Rolf Aurich, film historian and editor at Deutsche Kinemathek & Wolfgang Jacobsen, film historian and author. Reproduced with kind permission of Europe's Finest.