



The Unknown © 1927 WBFI

Not For Sale (1924)

Saturday 19 March 2022

Introduction By: Bryony Dixon

Performing Live: Stephen Horne

Scriptwriter Lydia Hayward was one of the great discoveries of the British Silent Film Festival and Professor Christine Gledhill went on to research her film work for the recently upgraded Women Film Pioneers Database as part of a wider programme to seek out the hidden work of women in British silent cinema. Hayward was an actress turned screenwriter with a talent for turning slight but charming stories into elegant and workable screenplays, so reliably that the Bioscope in 1927 dubbed her 'the finest scenario writer we have'. Her work in partnership with director Manning Haynes, on their adaptations of W. W. Jacobs' stories, were particularly delightful, very British stories, all filmed in coastal locations and beautifully adapted for an ensemble cast. In "Not for Sale", under a different director, WP Kellino, we once again find that Hayward was able to extract beautifully rounded characters from her source material and insert them into an effortlessly elegant structure

In this modest but well-constructed tale, Martin (Ian Hunter) a young aristocrat is cut off with a tiny stipend by his exasperated father after he foolishly hands over his allowance to a feckless sponger. He is reduced to working for a living and residing in a Bloomsbury boarding house, run by the impoverished Annie (Mary Odette) who is struggling to keep her head above water, helped and hindered by a kind of extended dysfunctional family. Particularly enjoyable performances come from Gladys Hamer's 'slavey' who is trying to reform her boyfriend of his thieving ways and Mickey Brantford's turn as Annie's brother John, a sprightly twelve-year-old with a flair for impersonation whose take on Lon Chaney's 'Hunchback of Notre Dame' has to be seen to be believed. More fun is supplied by the snooty borders, such as Maud Gill, who was so memorable in Hitchcock's *The Farmer's Wife*, and the ubiquitous Moore Marriott. The leads (of course) fall in love somewhere among the plot twists before an obstacle is thrown in their path when the overly-honourable Martin takes the rap for a co-worker's petty theft. Class divisions begin to rear their ugly heads to keep the lovers from each other.

'Not for Sale' was based on the novel of the same name by Monica Ewer, film and drama critic for the Labour leaning Daily Herald. She wrote dozens of novels at least two of which were adapted for film and a couple such as 'Film of Fortune' and 'Insecurity' were set in the world of filmmaking itself. As a committed left winger she wrote with a heightened awareness of the nuances of the English class system which in 'Not for Sale' shows us the full range of class divisions of the 1920s, from the indigent poor and petty criminal of the maid's

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boyfriend, through the respectable working class layers, to middle class Annie and the upper class of Martin's family. The comic potential of the interactions between the class levels is neatly exploited in the film but is also balanced with a subtle message about how class prejudice can have a very serious impact on the lives of individuals.

The strong ensemble cast is well directed by comedy king, W P Kellino who made this, the last of a trilogy of comedies for the Stoll Company. Kellino was related to the famous family of acrobats and had long experience of comedy filmmaking with his own company Ec-Ko in featuring comics like Fred Evans, Lupino Lane and Billy Merson.

By **Bryony Dixon**, curator at the BFI National Archive with special responsibility for silent film, and author of *100 Silent Films* (BFI Screen Guides 2011) and *The Story of Victorian Film* (BFI 2022). She has been lead curator on recent BFI silent film restorations, including all nine surviving Hitchcock silent films, the works of Anthony Asquith, *The Great White Silence* (1924), *Shiraz* (1928) and is currently working on *The Rat* (1925) and the *Sherlock Holmes* series 1921-23.

Director W.P. Kellino | Scenario Writer. Lydia Hayward | Photography. Percy Strong | Production. Stoll Film Company UK | 1924 | N/C U | 1h 26m

With: Mary Odette, Ian Hunter, Gladys Hamer, Jack Trevor, Phyllis Lytton, Lionelle Howard, Mary Brough, Maud Gill, Edward O'Neill, Moore Marriott, Mickey Brantford, George Bellamy.

Screening material courtesy of BFI National Archive

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