

Hippodrome Silent Film Festival celebrates the silver screen

The glitz and glamour of the twenties will be celebrated as Scotland's only festival dedicated to silent cinema begins in just two weeks' time.

The 14th edition from 20 – 24 March 2024 takes place in the Hippodrome Cinema, Bo'ness and festival audiences are promised an "uninhibited jamboree of the silver screen".

The programme includes rare screenings, fascinating talks, and exciting excursions and workshops all celebrating the golden age of cinema.

The Festival has become a mainstay in the cultural cinema calendar, with popular annual events such as the traditional Saturday morning jeely-jar-screening, this year featuring comedy great Buster Keaton in **Steamboat Bill, Jr.** and two-for-one tickets when you bring a clean jam jar; the immersive Platform Reels screening of **The Flying Scotsman** on the heritage platform of the Bo'ness and Kinneil Railway; and **New Found Sound**, where young musicians accompany shorts from the National Library Scotland's Moving Image Archive.



PHOTO Kat Gollock

With so much taking place during the five-day Festival, here are five events that you might have missed:

Just Around the Corner (1921) 3.00pm Friday 22 March

HippFest is renowned for its glamorous Friday Night Gala, but Friday afternoon is just as worthy of a visit with a rare example of a 1920s film with a woman officially occupying the director's chair. Part of HippFest's triptych of films remembering Frances Marion, this is one of only two films with solo directing credit accorded to the prolific Hollywood screenwriter.

On New York's ghettoised Lower East Side, impoverished widow Ma Birdsong, is decent, hardworking, and devoted to her two children – Jimmie and Essie. Ma wishes nothing more than to see her daughter marry a "good man" who will look after her, and for Jimmie to get an honest job. But Essie's naivety leaves her vulnerable to a caddish suitor who threatens to dash their mother's hopes. This unabashedly sentimental drama about maternal love and the trials of navigating a man's world is a tantalising glimpse of another dimension of Marion's unparalleled gift for movie making.

Prepare for the film with **Frances Marion: Hollywood's Favourite Storyteller**, part of HippFest at Home pre-festival talks presented by Pamela Hutchinson.

Workshop: Cooking With Joan Crawford 2.30pm Sunday 24 March

HippFest includes a long list of big names and star-studded credits, and now you can not only see Joan Crawford in her breakout role in *Our Dancing Daughters* on the Saturday but you can learn how to entertain like the Queen of the Screen with HippFest's hands-on cocktail and canapé workshop.

Your host Jenny Hammerton (silverscreensuppers.com) will share Joan's wisdom on how to host fabulous dinner parties and why you should glitter and sparkle as you greet your guests. You'll make some of Joan's favourite party recipes, sample her signature cocktail then learn how to make it at home. Bring an apron and container for 'carry-oots' and, when you get home,

do as Joan would do without fail: dine by candlelight.

Queen of Sports (1934) 3.00pm Sunday 24 March

Prepare for the summer Olympics with this wholesome sporting drama, starring Chinese superstar Li Li-li who fizzes with vitality as a young athlete who learns that there is no “i” in “team”.

The legendary director Sun Yu (*Daybreak*, HippFest 2016) created this sporty narrative specifically for Li-li whose roles tended to characterise her as energetic, wholesome and desirable. Her athletic abilities are woven into the story of Lin Ying who arrives in Shanghai, full of beans and competitive spirit, eager to take up her training at a sports college. Temptations abound in the big city but luckily her stern, handsome tutor is on hand to make sure she stays on track.

Adventures of Half a Ruble (1929) 8.00pm Thursday 21 March

Following last year’s UK Premiere of *In Spring* (1929), HippFest revisits Ukrainian culture with a charming adaptation of children’s stories by political activist, writer, playwright and artist Volodymyr Vynnychenko. Vynnychenko’s works were banned from the 1930s until the mid-1980s but he is now recognised as pre-revolutionary Ukraine’s leading modernist writer.

The film follows the exploits of young Fedko – valiant leader of a rabble of downtrodden children whose playground is the snowy streets and icy rivers of Kyiv. Constantly feuding with the mean-spirited “Manager” and his spoiled son, Fedko must keep his wits about him to get by. Guaranteed to melt the hardest of hearts, this beautifully shot, fresh-faced film is one of HippFest 2024’s must-sees.

The Racket (1928) 7.30pm Saturday 23 March

Before there was *Scarface*, there was *The Racket*.

Hollywood film tycoon Howard Hughes produced this bold crime drama four years before his famously influential follow-up rattled Tinseltown. The film was nominated in the Outstanding Picture category at the first Academy Awards and stars matinee idol Thomas Meighan as the honest cop who vows to bring down his Capone-like nemesis, played by thug-faced Louis Wolheim. The pair battle it out in a corrupt, noirish, Prohibition-era Chicago while Marie Prevost's sassy gangster's moll Helen looks on with wry disdain and steals the show from everyone!

HippFest Director, Alison Strauss said: "HippFest is proud to have grown a real community of people who share an adventurous appetite for extraordinary cinema and live music. We can't wait to welcome everyone to discover these and the many other brilliant films and musicians that we have lined up. Come one come all, and be part of the unique atmosphere of the Festival, of Bo'ness and of the Hippodrome itself, where you'll be sure to find great films, great fun, and great music."

The Hippodrome Silent Film Festival will run Wednesday 20 to Sunday 24 March 2024 at the Hippodrome Cinema in Bo'ness with a daily Festival shuttle bus running between Linlithgow station and the cinema.

Selected events and screenings will be livestreamed from the cinema, plus pre-festival talks as part of **HippFest At Home**. For more information about the full HippFest 2024 programme and to purchase tickets, visit www.hippfest.co.uk.

The Hippodrome Silent Film Festival is a project of **Falkirk Council**, supported by **Film Hub Scotland** part of the **BFI's Film Audience Network**, and funded by **Screen Scotland** and **National Lottery** funding from the **BFI**.



PHOTO Tom Duffin