

ROGER JOHNSON'S REPORT ON THE DISCOVERY OF THE MISSING GILLETTE FILMS

From Roger Johnson

The most comprehensive commentary on the "discovery" of the missing Gillette films that we have seen!

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SHERLOCK HOLMES: 100-YEARS-LOST FILM FOUND AT CINÉMATHÈQUE FRANÇAISE Cinémathèque Française and San Francisco Silent Film Festival to Restore!

The silent film version of Sherlock Holmes starring William Gillette has been found! Long considered lost since its first release, the Gillette film is a vital missing link in the history of Holmes on screen.

Directed by Arthur Berthelet and produced by Essanay Studios in 1916, it was discovered at the Cinémathèque Française only a few weeks ago.

By the time the film was made, Gillette had been established as the world's foremost interpreter of Holmes on stage.

He gave his face and manner to the detective and inspired the classic illustrations of Frederic Dorr Steele.

Dynamic but calm, he played Holmes in the colorful attire—bent-stemmed briar, ornate dressing gown, and deerstalker cap—that has been identified ever since with the character.

Just as durable was Gillette's distinctive bearing, preserved in the film: the charismatic, all-seeing detective who dominates scenes with his preternatural stillness.

Booth Tarkington famously wrote after seeing Gillette on stage, "I would rather see you play Sherlock Holmes than be a child again on Christmas morning." For the well-known Chicago bookman, Vincent

Starrett, Gillette was beyond criticism.

But perhaps the most telling accolade came from Arthur Conan Doyle himself, who had killed Holmes off and thought he was through with the character.

After reading Gillette's adaptation for the stage, he said, "It's good to see the old chap back."

"Sir Arthur, you don't know the half of it," says Professor Russell Merritt, the supervising editor of the project and member of the Baker Street Irregulars.

"At last we get to see for ourselves the actor who kept the first generation of Sherlockians spellbound.

We can also see where the future Holmeses—Rathbone, Brett, Cumberbatch, and the rest—come from.

As far as Holmes is concerned, there's not an actor dead or alive who hasn't consciously or intuitively played off Gillette."

The newly found Essanay production is not only Gillette's sole surviving appearance as Holmes.

It is also the only film Gillette ever made, a unique opportunity to view the work of a major American

actor in the legendary role that he wrote for himself.

The film faithfully retains the play's famous set pieces—Holmes's encounter with Professor Moriarty, his daring escape from the Stepney Gas Chamber, and the tour-de-force deductions—and illustrates how Gillette wove bits from Conan Doyle's stories ranging from "A Scandal in Bohemia" to "The Final Problem," into an original, innovative mystery play.

THE RESTORATION PROJECT

A nitrate dupe negative of Sherlock Holmes was found in the vaults of the Cinémathèque Française.

Originally assembled for French distribution, the negative contains French flash titles and color annotations.

This color information is quite surprising for an Essanay film, since usually Essanay's domestic releases were usually in black and white.

The colors in this case were probably intended for French distribution.

The film is now being digitally restored by the San Francisco Silent Film Festival and the Cinémathèque Française, the third such partnership between the organizations.

The restoration is also made possible by the financial support of private individuals from the United States and the United Kingdom.

Film restorer (and SFSFF Board President) Robert Byrne says, "It's an amazing privilege to work with these reels that have been lost for generations.

William Gillette's Sherlock Holmes has ranked among the holy grails of lost film and my first glimpse of the footage confirms Gillette's magnetism.

Audiences are going to be blown away when they see the real Sherlock Holmes on screen for the first time."

The European premiere will take place at the Cinémathèque Française's festival of film restoration, Toute la Mémoire du Monde, in January 2015.

The American premiere will take place at the San Francisco Silent Film festival in May 2015.

ABOUT THE ORGANIZATIONS

San Francisco Silent Film Festival is a nonprofit organization that celebrates the lasting artistic, cultural, and historical importance of silent film and engages modern audiences by giving them an opportunity to experience the extraordinary quality that Academy Award-winning film historian Kevin Brownlow calls "live cinema." Reflecting the breadth and diversity of silent-era filmmaking, SFSFF's programming is a lively and thought-provoking mix of classics, lesser-known gems, and important international work—all presented with live musical accompaniment.

Serving a role in cinema preservation by showcasing restorations and preservations from archives around the world, SFSFF has also helped bring several titles back to life.

In recent years, SFSFF has had a direct hand in the restoration of The Last

Edition, The Half-Breed, The Good Bad Man, and now Sherlock Holmes.

www.silentfilm.org

Cinémathèque Française was founded in 1936 by Henri Langlois, Georges Franju and Paul Auguste Harlé.

From the beginning it has been one of the most famous film archives in the world, thanks to the importance of the film and non-film collections.

According to Martin Scorsese: "The filmmakers from all over the world know about the Cinémathèque Française even if they never went inside.

This is our spiritual home."

www.cinematheque.fr

Press Contact: Larsen Associates
larsenassc@aol.com 415-957-1205

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