

The 19th British Silent Film Festival

Sept 13-17 2017



A Sister of Six (1927)

Saturday 16 September, 4.45pm



Directed by Carl Hoffman but credited on the film to Ragnar Cavallius with Carl Hoffman as cinematographer

UK, 102 mins, released 3 October 1927, Comedy

Set design: Vilhelm Bryde

Story: Frans Herczegs

Adaptation: Paul Merzbach

Producer: Oscar Hemberg

Cast: Betty Balfour, Willy Fritsch, Anna Lisa Ryding, Harry Holm, Ivan Hedquist

Print courtesy of the Swedish Film Institute - Swedish intertitles with verbal translation.

Advertisement for a screening at the Regent Theatre, Great Yarmouth, 29 October 1927:

A Brilliant love story of love, adventure and humour.

Charming scenes – Gorgeous Gowns – Splendid Acting. Betty Balfour's greatest picture

***Folkestone Herald*, Saturday 31 September 1927, p.3:**

A Sister of Six reveals Miss Balfour at her best. It is an international picture directed by Mr. Ragnar Cawallius. The picture is full of delightful complications arising from changed identities and as all the characters are well played the comedy is full of fun. Miss Balfour is supported by Mr. Willy Fritsch, a popular Continental artiste.

Hartlepool Northern Daily Mail, Tuesday 25 October 1927, p.5

The story is an excellent one, and there is a succession of irresistibly funny situations. Needless to say, Miss Balfour has numerous opportunities for the display of her talents, and full advantage of this fact is taken. She is ably seconded by Willy Fritsch, who enters into the fun in a splendid fashion. The remainder of the cast support the leading characters admirably.

The Bioscope, 16 June 1927, p.44:

IN BRIEF: The exploits of a mad-cap girl, one of seven sisters, and how, masquerading as someone else, she secures a husband intended for another. A bright and lively, somewhat confused story, showing Betty Balfour in a congenial part.

Plot: Mizzi Gurtory, one of seven sisters, whose mother has difficulty in educating and providing for, is expelled from school for disrespectful behaviour to the headmistress, and losing her ticket and money on the return home, is assisted by a young man to whom she poses as the Countess Hohenstein, taking the name from a bad left on the rack. The real Countess, who has just left the train, has been summoned by her aunts because of her infatuation for an actor, which the aristocratic ladies consider proof of madness. Therefore, when Mizzi arrives at her destination she is captured by a chauffeur, driven off in a motor car and locked up in a padded room. She is rescued from this by her travelling companion, the count Horkay, who has undertaken to act for a friend engaged to one of Mizzi's sisters, and break off the match for him. He secures Mizzi's release from the padded room by dressing as a female nurse and smuggling in a suit of boy's clothes for Mizzi, who again complicates matters by annexing the very smart costume of a popular actress. After many changes and surprises, in which Tony Horkay implicates himself with the real and supposed wives of Tony Gurtory, matters are successfully adjusted and each secures the partner he desires.

Comment: The story is a rather complicated one, further involved by some similarity between the two leading men, who are both known as Tony, but this is not of great importance as the interest of the play lies in the situations and escapades of the chief characters rather than by the means by which the inevitable happy ending is achieved. It is an amusing light entertainment, extremely well played not only by the two leading characters, but by a company responsible for many amusing comedy types. Costumes and settings help towards making a bright and pleasing entertainment.

Acting: Betty Balfour looks charming and plays the part of Mizzi with her usual vivacity and sense of humour, making an attractive part out of very slight material. She receives excellent support from the Tony Horkay of Willy Fritsch, and clever and amusing stories are

contributed by Anna Lisa Ryding, Harry Holm, Lydia Potetchina, Ivan Hedquist and others whose names are not given.

Production: Smart Hungarian uniforms, elegant and fashionable costumes, and many handsomely furnished interiors form adequate setting, and the photography is excellent.

Programme note compiled by Jenny Stewart

Betty Balfour (1903-1978)



Betty Balfour (born in London on 27 March 1903) was the only international star of the British silent cinema, the most popular actress in Britain in the '20s and in 1927 named by the *Daily Mirror* as the country's favourite world star. Gamine-like, she was a consummate screen actress, whose sympathetic portrayals were often tinged with pathos.

Her talent was most evident in the 'Squibs' comedy series produced by George Pearson, while in his *Love, Life and Laughter* (1923) and *Reveille* (1924), she demonstrated a serious side to her character. The partnership ended after *Blinkeyes* (1926), when Pearson's offer to divorce his wife and marry Balfour was rejected by the actress.

She made her stage debut in 1913, and was appearing in *Medora* at the Alhambra Theatre when T.A. Welsh and Pearson saw and signed her for *Nothing Else Matters* (1920). After replacing Gertrude Lawrence on stage in *The Midnight Follies*, Balfour was back with Pearson with her first starring role in *Mary-Find-the-Gold* (1921).

She was equally popular on the Continent, starring in the German films, *Die Sieben Töchter der Frau Gyurkovics* (Germany, d. Ragnar Hylten-Cavallius, 1927) and *Die Regimentstochter* (Germany, d. Hans Behrendt, 1929); she starred for Marcel l'Herbier in *Le Diable au Coeur* (France, 1927), for Louis Mercanton in *Monkeynuts* (France, 1928) and for Geza von Bolvary in *Bright Eyes* (Austria/UK, 1929). Back in Britain, she also starred in Alfred Hitchcock's *Champagne* (1928).

Balfour's sound debut, *The Brat* (d. Louis Mercanton, 1930), based on the 'Squibs' character, was only moderately successful, and her popularity waned in the talkies.

'Britain's Queen of Happiness' was anything but happy in her private life: her 1931 marriage to composer Jimmy Campbell ended in divorce in 1941; and, after a failed stage comeback in 1952, she attempted suicide, and was a recluse for the last 20 years of her life.



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