

The 19th British Silent Film Festival



Anders als die Andern/Different from the Others

Friday 15 September, 5.45pm

With an illustrated talk by Dr Matthew Jones (De Montfort University) on LGBT+ representation in German silent cinema



Germany, 1919, Silent, 50mins.

Director: Richard Oswald

Screenplay: Richard Oswald, Magnus Hirschfeld

Cinematographer: Max Fassbender

Cast: Conrad Veidt (Paul), Anita Berber, Helga Molander, Fritz Schultz (Kurt), Reinhold Schunzel (Frank Bollek), Magnus Hirschfeld (as himself)

Extracts from Roy Grundmann, 'Gay-Themed films of the German Silent Era', *Cineaste*, Winter 2005, pp.63 -66:

"The largely non-exploitative treatment of homosexuality in *Different from the Others* owes to the creative influence of two men, the sexologist and founder of the homosexual emancipation movement, Magnus Hirschfeld, who co-wrote the script and appeared in the film as himself, and director Oswald, who specialised in this genre and reportedly sought to ensure that its mission to educate was no mere alibi for prurience. Their collaboration produced a liberal treatment with typical strengths and drawbacks. Hirschfeld inserted key scenes into the plot that have Paul consult the scientist for help, and, in turn, receive didactically played-up assurance that his proclivities are neither a sin nor a sickness, but merely a variation of nature. In 1919, this effort at depathologizing homosexuality constituted nothing less than scientific heresy and would, in fact, remain radically controversial for decades to come."

Extracts from John Nangle, Review of the Kino Video Release in *Classic Images*, January 2005, p.36:

"Before hearing of the merits of this rare, ground-breaking film, a few historical background notes from the movie's well-documented prologue are in order: Thousands of homosexual men in Germany were imprisoned to terms of up to five years under Paragraph 195 of the Penal Code. The law was toughened in the Nazi era and later liberalised in East and West Germany, but not fully repealed until 1994.

The law was challenged as early as 1897 by the German Homosexual Emancipation Movement, the first such initiative worldwide. Its leader, Dr. Magnus Hirschfeld (1868-1935) held that homosexuals constituted a biological 'third sex', a social minority unjustly subjected to discrimination.

Director Richard Oswald collaborated with Hirschfeld, who acted in and wrote the film. He also produced a series of widely hailed 'enlightenment films' aimed at sexual education. They dealt with venereal disease, prostitution and abortion, supported by plots that featured counselling by a wise physician.

After WWI, censorship was temporarily lifted. This film *Different From the Others* was the first film to deal explicitly with homosexuality. Within a year, German studios had released some 150 feature films with sexual themes, many of which were lurid and exploitative but commercially successful. The outcry they provoked re-introduced film censorship. At the centre of the controversy was *Different From the Others*, which was banned in 1920 and survives today as only a fragment.

Different From the Others has Conrad Veidt (this same year he portrayed Cesar the somnambulist in the legendary *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari*) as Paul Korner, a gay concert pianist blackmailed by a closeted lowlife names Ballek. Korner goes to the German courts for protection, and, although Ballek receives an extensive sentence, Korner is shunned by family and associates, loses his bookings and, in the depths of depression, takes his own life.

In flashbacks, we see the young Paul being pursued by women at parties, undergoing a hypnotic 'cure', ridiculed by classmates, thrown out of university and visiting a sexologist (Dr Hirschfeld) who proclaims, 'Love for one's own sex can be just as pure and noble as that for the opposite sex.' In one particularly poignant scene, Paul becomes part of a parade of gay luminaries, including Tchaikovsky, da Vinci, Oscar Wilde and King Ludwig II.

Programme note compiled by Jenny Stewart



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