

# The 19<sup>th</sup> British Silent Film Festival



## *Such Is the Law*

UK 1928 / 1930

Production Company: Stoll Picture Productions

Director: Sinclair Hill

Screenplay, scenario and dialogue: Leslie Howard Gordon

Photography: Desmond Dickinson

Art direction: Walter W. Murton, Louis Delany

Music: Herbert Griffiths

Dresses designed and supplied by: Reville (1926) Ltd., Norman Hartnell Ltd., Elspeth Fox-Pitt

Production manager: Oswald Mitchell

Sound recordist: Dallas Bower

Sound system: Visatone

Studio: Cricklewood Sound Studios, London

Shooting: May-July 1928 (silent footage); September 1930 (sound footage)

Running time: 88 minutes

BFI print: 78 minutes

**Cast:** Janice Adair (Marjorie), Pamela Carme (Mrs Marjoribanks), Kate Cutler (The Mother), Lady Tree (The Grandmother), Winifred Oughton (The Maid), Bert Coote (Sir George), Carl Harbord (Vivian Fairfax), Frank Goldsmith (Stephen Pendleton), Rex Maurice (Philip Carberry), C. Aubrey Smith (Sir James Whittaker)

Cast in footage from *The Price of Divorce* (1928): Wyndham Standing (The Doctor), Frances Day (The Wife), Miriam Seegar (The Other Woman), Rex Maurice (The Other Man), Frances Rose Campbell (The Old Nurse), George Butler (The Counsel for the Petitioner), Johnnie Ashby (The Child), Nancy Price (The Aunt), Maud Gill (The Aunt's Maid), James Fenton (The Doctor's Lawyer)

**Variety, 15 October 1930, p. 15:**

"Stoll Picture Productions Ltd. reported a loss of \$41,000 on last year's working. The company, headed by Sir Oswald Stoll and linked up with his theatre interests, did not make a picture all this time. The studios have since been equipped with Visatone apparatus controlled by the Marconi company. First talker to be made under the system, *Such is the Law*, has been finished and is to be handled by Butchers, indie distributor. Story of this film is so twisted the producers are able to use up two reels of an old silent film, *Price of Divorce*, which Stoll made two years back but never put on the market."

**Film Weekly, 9 May 1931, p 30:**

"This film is for those who think rather than for those who merely sit back and watch. It is a piece of work with a good central idea and an interesting method of treatment. It combines two stories, one of which is told in silent action, using the dialogue of the other by way of explanation. At the climax the two blend into one,

and the related story has the effect of saving the heroine from an elopement with a worthless man.

Her mother, suspecting that the girl is about to do something rash, engineers the conversation towards the discussion of a peculiar divorce case. The girl is impressed by this, especially when it is found that her friends actually knew the people concerned in it . . .

The film is well acted by a good cast, mainly consisting of stage players. Sinclair Hill has told the story well, if slowly . . . Something different."

**The Stage, 20 November 1930, p 20:**

"Marking the return to production of the Stoll company after a somewhat long rest, this admirable picture is chiefly remarkable for the introduction of the best recording process yet heard. The system is that of the Marconi Wireless Telegraph Company, and is not only new but British. The voices are natural and clear, with no sign of blurring on certain words and letters. The story of the film is not particularly effective, but it has some novel points, and is well told, while the direction of Sinclair Hill is first class. Roughly, we have a doctor who has been trapped into divorce by a worthless wife, and who later is torn by his love for his child and for a young girl. Happiness seems impossible, but comes eventually.. a well-handled angle is that the wife's lover is also trying to ruin the young girl. . . ."

**Picturegoer, January 1931, p. 19, Sinclair Hill:**

"The fact that I have endeavoured to introduce in *Such is the Law*, the first talkie production of the Stoll Film Company, a treatment that does not bring the stage technique into the studio or conform to the more orthodox talkie technique which is tyrannised by the sound system, appears to have caught quite a flutter in the dovecotes. I am afraid that I have no regrets on this score, and confess that I am an unrepentant rebel against this servile subjection to the microphone. I am in favour of making it my servant rather than my master. In *Such is the Law* I have used sound to convey certain effects and to accompany action, as it were, rather than to employ the story as an excuse for sound . . .

A talkie, I take it, is still to all intents and purposes a film, but at present it is rapidly tending to become merely a photographed play; and if it has any pretensions to being a film, then it should, I think, fulfill its first obligation as a film and be – a *motion* picture . . . I want to use sound, not for sound's sake, but for an intelligent alliance with action. I want the talkie to be a "movie" once more. I want the music in my films that is scored specially to enhance the theme of the film with its rhythm and punctuation, and if necessary to displace the dialogue where a vocal silence would be more eloquent than words. I want to introduce the exterior again and, instead of being tied to the studio, to take the whole unit out into the countryside, which offers such vast opportunities for beautiful and characteristic backgrounds to British stories. Above all, I want stories that are original and written with a national interest from the camera's, as well as the microphone's, standpoint. If I am fortunate enough to have my way, I shall hope to produce pictures which, if not aspiring to be masterpieces, are at least endeavouring to move a little along the path of progress which now spreads so invitingly before the British film director."

**Picturegoer, January 1931, p. 47, P. L. Mannock:**

"In this issue Sinclair Hill, the director of *Such is the Law*, explains his aims and ambitions in the talkie field. Undoubtedly he has tried to combine sound and silent technique in the picture, but I do not think it is a successful experiment; it is

not nearly such a good film as Dark Red Roses, his first long talkie. He has, by grafting a dialogue story on a silent one, the former explaining the latter, merely given us an advanced edition of the magic lantern descriptive song or story . . . It becomes very artificial and monotonous, in spite of the endeavours of Janice Adair, Aubrey Smith, and Kate Cutler, who all speak admirably." *Programme compiled by Geoff Brown*



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