

The 13th  
**British  
Silent Film  
Festival**

**PHOENIX**  
FILM & DIGITAL MEDIA

## The Dodge Brothers performing to *Beggars of Life*

Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> April, 2pm

US 1928

Director: William A. Wellman

Adaptation by Jim Tulley (based on his own novel)

Photography: Henry Gerrard

Editor: Allyson Shaffer

100 mins

### Cast

Wallace Beery	Oklahoma Red
Louise Brooks	Nancy
Richard Arlen	Jim
Edgar Washington	Black Mose
H.A Morgan	Skinny
Andy Clark	Bill
Roscoe Karns	Lame Hoppy
Bob Perry	The Arkansas Snake
Johnnie Morris	Rubin
Jacques Chaplin	Baldy

The Dodge Brothers are renowned for playing the hell out of classic Americana. Singing songs about transport, heartbreak and homicide, they render distinctive narratives of mean women, bad man and railroads and set them to hard driving rhythms. Their sounds is 'a call to the restless spirit' and provides the perfect accompaniment to William A.



Wellman's legendary 1928 film *Beggars of life*. A tale of depression era, rail-riding hobos played the iconic Louise Brooks and Jim Arlen.

TV and radio presenter Mark Kermode thumps the double bass and blows a lonesome harmonica. Joining him with howling guitar and plaintive banjo is Mike Hammond alongside the ringing guitar and mandolin of Aly Hirji. They're backed up by percussion on a shoe-string from Al Hammond. The quartet will be joined for this performance by Honorary Dodge Neil Brand on keyboards.

### Film Reviews

*Kinematograph* September 13 1929

Warning: contains plot spoilers

For its thrills retained sentiment and because Wallace Beery has a "straight" role, the picture is bound to interest. Acting and production are very good indeed and the entertainment value universal.

Acting - As Oklahoma Red, Wallace Beery is sound, but adds nothing to his reputation in a "straight" part. The one or two occasions in which he shines are due to delight a legitimate comedy touches. Richard Arlen gives a most sympathetic,

even subtle, performance as the tramp, while Louise Brooks is admirable as the girl. The reminders of the cast are all praiseworthy.

Production - William A. Wellman has a good sense of character values, and in one scene where the tramp and the girl pass the right in a haycock he has shown great restraint and charm.

The general tenor of the picture is sombre, partly because the action nearly all takes place at night and in the interiors of freight trains. The theme however, is capable of good cheer and does not quite appear to warrant the tragic ending, although providing a chance for the star to be the foreground.

The director's chief triumph is that he has taken a handful of hoboes and made each lives. For this reason the ins and outs of what may seem to be impatient a slow moving in mid-film are well worth following.

Setting and photography – Very good camera work struggles successfully, after the opening scenes, with perpetual night lighting in dark places. Angles are very well chosen.

Points of appeal – The stars and the charm of a novel crook story go hand in hand with adventure and good production.

*The Bioscope September 12th 1928*

Comment – the story opens with a somewhat gruesome picture of the dead and the events which lead up to the girl's tragic act, and continues with a series of thrills right up to the end when the train blazing furiously, hurtles over the cliff. A good touch of humour is supplied in a court scene held by the tramps while on board a freight train and over which Oklahoma presided. One has insight into the element that of *esprit de corps* which exists among the wanderers of the countryside, in their individual quarrels but combined front, against the common enemy. Altogether the story is one of strong dramatic interest.

Acting – Wallace Beery is cast in a part particularly suited to him and is seen to great advantage as the roaring bullying hobo. While it is difficult to reconcile

the man with the chivalrous act he performs, the result is at least to gain a little sympathy where none exists before. Louise Brooks plays a difficult part with distinction and Richard Arlen is extremely good as her tramp lover. The rest of the support is excellent.

Suitability - For drama houses

*Louise Brooks*

It has been said that her best American role was in one of the early sound film dramas, *Beggars of Life* (1928), as an abused country girl on the run with Richard Arlen and Wallace Beery playing hoboes she meets while riding the rails. Much of this film was shot on location, and the boom microphone was invented for this film by the director William Wellman, who needed it for one of the first experimental talking scenes in the movies.

Soon after the film *Beggars Of Life* was made, Brooks, who loathed the Hollywood "scene", refused to stay on at Paramount after being denied a promised raise, and left for Europe to make films for G. W. Pabst, the great German Expressionist director.

On August 8, 1985, Louise Brooks was found dead of a massive heart attack. She was buried in Sepulchre Cemetery in Rochester, New York.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Louise\\_Brooks](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Louise_Brooks)

*BEGGARS OF LIFE - Print from the Collection of George Eastman House. Preservation funded by The Film Foundation.*