



# The 15th British Silent Film Festival



## LADY WINDERMERE'S FAN

ERNST LUBITSCH, GREAT BRITAIN, 1925

Screening: Friday 20 April, 3.30 pm



Images courtesy of the bfi Stills, Posters and Designs

Ernst Lubitsch's unique directorial style, combining sophisticated, often satirical, humour and an eye for staging and detail, made him an ideal choice for adapting Oscar Wilde's *Lady Windermere's Fan* to the silver screen. The play was actually the first comedy written by Wilde, and was first staged in February 1892. Wilde's play, a biting satire of Victorian morality, is adapted with considerable fidelity by Lubitsch, but it wasn't the first cinematic adaptation of Wilde's play – Fred Paul, director of the *Grand Guignol* dramas screened as part of yesterday's Festival programme, had directed the first film of *Lady Windermere's Fan* in 1916.

This afternoon's screening is of the 1925 adaptation of the play which, in 2002, was designated of significant cultural, historical and aesthetic value, and was subsequently selected for preservation in the United States Film Registry by the Library of Congress. The story involves the high-society shenanigans of Lady Windermere (May McAvoy) who, con-

vinced that her husband is having an affair, leaves him for Lord Darlington (Ronald Colman). Lord Windermere's 'mistress', Mrs Erlynne (Irene Rich), turns out not to be who Lady Windermere thought and, with a delightful twist in the tale, Lubitsch brings the proceedings to a close.

Other than Wilde's original play, Ronald Colman also provides a British presence within Lubitsch's film. Colman was born in Ealing and was forced to give up a place at Cambridge University following the death of his father. After discovering amateur theatre while at boarding school, his acting career began with a series of supporting roles in the late 1910s – he was invalided out of the British Army in 1915 following severe shrapnel wounds received at the first battle of Ypres. Most of these early British films, however, are lost – film historians presume that the negatives were destroyed during the Blitz. After moving to America to seek his fortune in 1920, his acting career began to take off. In 1923, he signed a contract with Samuel Goldwyn, and the films produced under this contract, including 1925's *Lady Windermere's Fan*, cemented his star status.

### CAST

Ronald Colman -  
Lord Darlington

May McAvoy - Lady

Windermere

Bert Lytell - Lord

Windermere

Irene Rich - Mrs

Erlynne

Edward Martindel -  
Lord Augustus Lorton

Carrie Daumery - The  
Duchess of Berwick

CREATIVE  
ENGLAND

