



**Raoul Walsh  
Season**

Eden Court Cinema  
13<sup>th</sup> September 2016  
at 7 pm

Review by Tony  
Janssens (InFifa),  
film notes compiled  
by Mark MacLennan  
(InFiFa).

## The Thief of Bagdad

Live Piano Accompaniment by Forrester Pyke.

1924, USA, B&W, Drama, Running time: 155 mins. Rating: U

Cast: Douglas Fairbanks, Julianne Johnston, Sojin, Anna May Wong, Snitz Edwards, Charles Belcher, Brandon Hurst.

Photography Arthur Edeson; production designer and art director William Cameron Menzies; edited by William Nolan; costumes by Mitchell Leisen. (155 minutes)

Scripted by: Lotta Woods, James O'Donohoe and Douglas Fairbanks (under the name Elton Thomas)

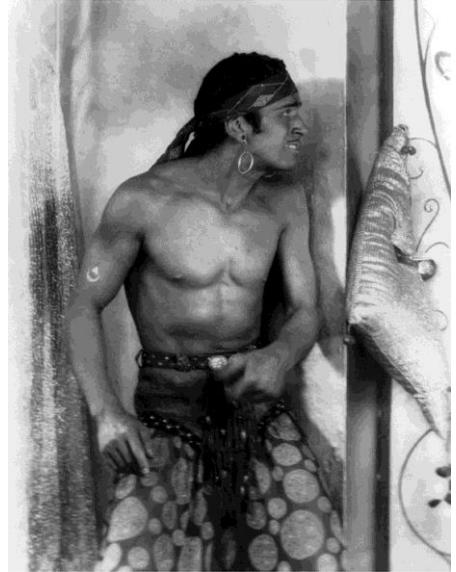
A crafty thief (Fairbanks) sneaks into the palace of Bagdad, where, passing himself off as a nobleman, he falls in love with the beautiful princess (Johnston). The thief is eventually caught and severely punished, but the princess saves his life, because she in return has fallen in love with him, and gives him a ring to augment their bond. But thieves can't simply marry princesses! A test is devised to select a befitting husband from her many suitors: "Send them to distant lands to seek some rare treasures. At the Seventh Moon let them return. Who brings the rarest treasure I will wed." The evil Mongol, King of Ho Sho (Sojin) greatly desires Bagdad's



conquer the enemy within? In 155 glorious minutes we will find out.

This timeless masterpiece needs to be seen on the big screen, the only proper way. 92 years young, the film amazes, thrills and entertains, transports us to faraway romantic lands that taste like honeyed innocence and spiced wonderment.

ravishing beauty, but even more so the enormous wealth that comes with her, and he too sets out on the quest, using all the resources at his command. Before the thief sets out on a series of adventures he goes to a mosque to beg forgiveness and seek the advice of a holy man who tells him: "Allah hath made thy soul to yearn for happiness, but thou must earn it." And that's what he does as Fairbanks' character, inspired and maturing as a human being, matches agility and ingenuity against the various difficulties, not unlike the Labours of Hercules, he encounters. He wanders into the "Cavern of Enchanted Trees", meets the "Old Man of the Midnight Sea", journeys to the "Abode of the Winged Horse", fights various monsters, including an enormous sea creature in a mesmerizing underwater scene, and, to fight the soldiers of the Mongol Prince, raises his own army of thousands by hurling magic seeds to the ground. Does the hero claim his prize and defeat evil, the Mongol Prince, the enemy from without? Does the thief become a true Prince and



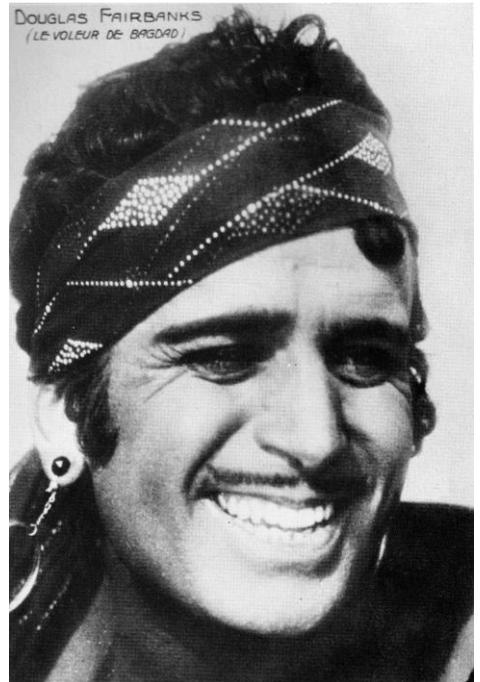
Fairbanks displayed the full gamut of his energetic athleticism with a nearly continuous succession of breathtaking stunts, a performance that was in part inspired by the ballet dancer Vaslav Nijinsky after Doug had seen him in Diaghilev's production of Sheherazade. It is all movement and space, strength and grace. "Vitality unabated", as the film writer David Thomson put it. If the words "Poetry in motion" have ever been applicable to an actor they certainly describe Fairbanks in his prime.

When the film came out critics said that the first audiences were overwhelmed by the richness of the film, a tribute to the art direction of the legendary William Cameron Menzies and the production values of Fairbanks whose own production company United Artists (the studio founded by D.W. Griffith, Mary Pickford, Charles Chaplin and the driving force of its formation, Fairbanks) financed the film.



But Raoul Walsh's superb direction, with its unity, pace, vitality and integrity was rightfully praised too. And he already was a great actors' director. Physical qualities in themselves, like energy masterly employed, beauty, sensuality and gracefulness, betterment of body and spirit, and man's struggle against the often overwhelming forces of nature are already main themes. These are themes Walsh would continue to explore with more realism and greater sureness, with far more complexity in his later films: High Sierra and Pursued, the other screenings in this mini-season that are indeed 2 crowning achievements of his art.

The Thief of Bagdad launched the director's career; however it is the summit of Douglas Fairbanks' enthralling artistry.



Live music has been a part of cinema since its beginnings. Pianists were employed in theaters and nickelodeons to improvise music to fit the scenes. The finest among them were musical commentators whose playing was determined by the nature of each scene. They were far more reliable than pre-recorded music. If the stylus of a phonograph skipped a groove in performance, or if the film strip in the projector broke, it was near impossible to regain synchronization in those early days.

So was amplifying the sound when audiences and theaters became larger. When the small nickelodeons began to be replaced by “dream palaces” that could seat thousands of movie-goers even the piano could no longer produce the necessary sounds. The largest palaces had space for a whole symphony orchestra, slightly smaller ones had a Wurlitzer organ installed to replicate orchestral effects.

With “The Thief of Bagdad” we go back to the early days. And it is our great fortune to have a Master of this art accompanying this screening.

**Forrester Pyke** has provided improvised piano accompaniment for silent movies at many venues for the last 22 years, including the Filmhouse Edinburgh, Glasgow Film Theatre and for the Edinburgh International Film Festival. Forrester has also composed music for the Scottish Screen Film Archives, Bo'ness Hippodrome Silent Cinema Festival, Falkirk Town Hall, Summerhall, Edinburgh, Eden Court Cinema, Inverness and the Macrobert Filmhouse, Stirling. "His talent for composition and improvisational technique have wowed audiences and brought screenings of classic films vividly to life for a whole new generation of cinema goers.

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Our next screening.....**High Sierra**

The second film in our.....**Raoul Walsh Season**



Eden Court Cinema

Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> September  
2016 at 7.15 pm

Humphrey Bogart stars in this seminal gangster classic, directed by Raoul Walsh, as a desperate outlaw determined to prove himself through one last heist.



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