

LACMA Film, March 2010

The following listings are program highlights presented by the film department of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA). Media inquiries for additional information, or for complete listings, should be directed to 323 857-6522. For general museum inquiries, call 323 857-6000.

Weekend Series**The Films of Jean Renoir**

March 12-April 10, 2010

"A director only makes one film in his life. Then he breaks it into pieces and makes it again."—Jean Renoir

Son of the painter Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Jean Renoir was born in Paris in 1894 and died a naturalized U.S. citizen in Beverly Hills in 1979. During a career stretching from 1924 to 1970, Renoir directed over forty films encompassing a wide variety of subjects, a rich body of work that has had an enduring influence on cinema universally and on French directors in particular. Embraced as the spiritual father of the New Wave by the young *Cahiers du cinema* critics turned filmmakers, his voice can be heard in many of that period's most important films, among them *Jules and Jim*, *Stolen Kisses*, *Pierrot le fou*, and *Celine and Julie Go Boating*.

As a young man in 1920s Paris, Renoir was exposed to the avant-garde films made by artists and inspired by their experiments with the medium. With the coming of sound, a time when most films were dialogue-driven and directors relied on cuts and close-ups to create drama, Renoir was composing long takes that allowed him to reveal his characters through their physical interaction in real time, and to connect them visually to the larger world of which they are part. A consummate technician, Renoir peppered his work with bravura passages of pure filmmaking, and his films still vibrate with the intensity of the moment.

Toni

Friday, March 12 | 7:30 pm

Inspired by a report of a crime passionel within a community of migrant laborers, Renoir decided to make a film entirely on location in Martigues, with its Provençal landscape of vineyards and rocky hills, and to cast non-professionals, mostly Italian migrants, in many of the roles. Toni, a simple man with a romantic streak, works in the local quarry and lives with the older Marie; but his easygoing manner disappears when he falls in love with Josepha, a fiery woman tied by marriage to Albert, the foreman of the quarry and a brute. François Truffaut called *Toni*, "a tragedy in which the

sun takes the place of Fate", an apt description for a film that portrays the natural world of the migrants with a powerful realism. "I was at pains to avoid the dramatic. My aim was to give the impression that I was carrying a camera and a microphone in my pocket and recording whatever came my way. My dream was uncompromising realism... but I was wrong! While I imagined I was filming a squalid episode based on real life, I was recounting, almost despite myself, a heart-rending and poetic love story."—Jean Renoir

1935/b&w/81 min. | Sc: Jean Renoir, Carl Einstein; dir: Jean Renoir; w/ Charles Blavette, Jenny Helia. Celia Montalván, Édouard Delmont. Bing Theater | \$10 general admission. \$7 museum members, seniors (62+), students with valid ID.

Swamp Water

Friday, March 12 | 9:20 pm

For his Hollywood debut Renoir settled on a script by Dudley Nichols, the author of several films by John Ford, Renoir's favorite American director, that tells the story of a young man living in a backward town who stumbles upon a fugitive from justice and his wild child daughter hiding in a nearby swamp. Although Renoir may have been attracted to the folkloric elements of the script and its focus on outsiders, he seized on the visual possibilities of the setting and convinced Fox to let him shoot on location. Anticipating by a decade Renoir's subtle use of the Ganges in *The River*, the Okefenokee Swamp in Georgia, with its black water and its poisonous snakes, serves as both location and metaphor, a place of danger and refuge around which swirl the tragic events of the story.

"A specimen of the Deep South poor white genre, a near-Western and a film noir in the general sense, (the film) draws much of its meaning from rural myth with its abrasive interactions between toil, trade, individuals, the family, the community, and exile."—Raymond Durgnat

1941/b&w/88 min. | Scr: Dudley Nichols; dir: Jean Renoir; w/ Walter Brennan, Walter Huston, Anne Baxter, Dana Andrews. Bing Theater | \$10 general admission. \$7 museum members, seniors (62+), students with valid ID.

French Cancan

Saturday, March 13 | 7:30 pm

Godard's comment that "Renoir is French to the tip of his toes" is borne out by Renoir's choice of subject for the film he would make on his return to France after a fifteen year absence: the birth of that quintessentially French phenomenon, the Cancan. In their fourth film together, Jean Gabin plays the robust impresario Danglard, a womanizer and a theatrical visionary whose ill-timed indiscretion threatens his plans to restore the Moulin Rouge to its former glory. "*French Cancan* is a tribute to the Paris of Auguste Renoir—though beautifully contrived in the studio, it beguiles us into feeling fresh air on the hills of Montmartre. It is a celebration of music hall and dance—the final set-piece is the explosive debut of the Cancan—but what makes it a great film is Renoir's ability to present the backstage story as a parable about fickle love and the abiding passion of theater. In the end, Danglard voices Renoir's

hope that if the show goes on, then life has a chance to surpass and redeem its human failures."—David Thomson
1955/color/102 min. | Scr/dir: Jean Renoir; w/ Jean Gabin, Françoise Arnoul, Maria Felix
Bing Theater | \$10 general admission. \$7 museum members, seniors (62+), students with valid ID.

The Golden Coach

Saturday, March 13 | 9:25 pm

A *commedia dell'arte* troupe from Italy arrives in an eighteenth century Peruvian town where the Viceroy, infatuated by the leading actress Camilla, presents her with the fabulous golden coach, a symbol of power, that he intended for his mistress. Built around the vivacious and volatile persona of Anna Magnani and set to the music of Antonio Vivaldi, *The Golden Coach* is a ravishing comic fantasy that presents the world of the theater as Camilla's first and only true love, a haven from the troubles of the real world to which she returns as the final curtain falls. "Light and serious, cynical and exquisite, a blend of color, wit and Vivaldi... Anna Magnani tries out a series of love roles in a play within a play within a movie. Magnani with her deep sense of the ridiculous in herself and others, Magnani with her roots in the earth, is the miraculous choice that gives this film its gusto and its piercing beauty."—Pauline Kael
1953/color/103 min. | Scr: Jean Renoir, Renzo Avanzo, Giulio Macchi, Jack Kirkland, Ginette Doynel; dir: Jean Renoir; w/ Anna Magnani, Odoardo Spadaro, Nada Fiorelli, Duncan Lamont
Bing Theater | \$10 general admission. \$7 museum members, seniors (62+), students with valid ID.

La bête humaine

Friday, March 19 | 7:30 pm

Lantier, an engineer, suspects that the yard foreman and his wife have murdered a man on his train but, seeing the fear in the woman's eyes, says nothing; his complicity leads to an affair with the woman, but when he falls victim to her duplicitous charms, his fate is sealed and the film hurtles to its pitiless ending. In adapting Zola's novel to the present, Renoir retained the theme of industrial progress as a force that crushes the humanity of ordinary men, and positioned Lantier, a man haunted by a family legacy of alcoholism and madness, as the central character. With its documentary-like opening sequence of a mighty locomotive racing along the tracks from Paris to Le Havre (the cameraman was strapped to the front of the engine) and its chiaroscuro lighting, *La bête humaine* has an intensity unlike any other Renoir film. "In *La bête humaine* there is a strong, ever-present rhythm like a heartbeat of the railroad, and the visual melancholic poetry of smoke, soot and steam. This somber melodrama became, in my opinion, one of the most beautiful of Renoir's pictures, a human drama of three poor beings struggling in the cogwheels of their passion. This feeling of doom corresponded with the atmosphere in Europe at the time. The air was charged with the tension of impending war..."—Eugene Lourie, Art Director
1938/b&w/100 min. | Scr/dir: Jean Renoir; w/ Jean Gabin, Simone Simon, Fernand Ledoux

Bing Theater | \$10 general admission. \$7 museum members, seniors (62+), students with valid ID.

The Woman on the Beach

Friday, March 19 | 9:20 pm

Renoir was invited by his friend Joan Bennett to direct a film for RKO based on a novel about a blind painter, his wife, and the mysterious man she meets on the beach and invites into their life. Renoir stated that he wanted to "make a love story in which there was no love, in which the attractions were purely physical," and despite the noir casting of Bennett as the *femme fatale* and Ryan as the archetypal loner scarred by a traumatic past, the final result was not a crime film but a cryptic love story steeped in an atmosphere of impending violence, punctuated by surreal dreams, and set in an isolated house vulnerable to fog and fire. A disastrous test screening led to severe cuts, but the existing version retains considerable power, inspiring the critic Andre Bazin to write: "It is a strange film, stubborn, sincere, elusive, obscure... it remains one of the most sincere and one of the most hampered of Renoir's works." Jacques Rivette writes on the film, "*The Woman on the Beach* looks like a film made by Fritz Lang...but the tragedy of the film does not stem from the inexorable force of destiny, as in Lang, but from fixation and immobility: each of the three characters is frozen in a false image of himself and his desire... However mutilated it is in comparison to the original, it can be as fairly judged as von Stroheim's *Greed*. If there was ever a director who conceives each part as a microcosm of the whole, it is Renoir."

1947/b&w/71 min. | Scr: Jean Renoir, Franck Davis, J.R. Michael Hogan; dir: Jean Renoir; w/ Joan Bennett, Robert Ryan, Charles Bickford

Bing Theater | \$10 general admission. \$7 museum members, seniors (62+), students with valid ID.

The Southerner

Saturday, March 20 | 7:30 pm

Renoir, casting against type, chose Texas-born Zachary Scott to play Sam Tucker, a desperately poor migrant cotton-picker who strikes out on his own, moving his wife, two kids and crotchety old mother onto an abandoned farm; a harsh winter follows but the family's efforts point to a good harvest until a flood washes the crop away. Renoir called *The Southerner*, "the most interesting film I've made here. Another story too simple to tell. A poor family is born, lives, dies..." The film was nominated for three Oscars including 'Best Director', and won the Grand Prize at the Venice Film Festival. "A harsh yet human antidote to traditional Hollywood attitudes about 'real people', this is Renoir's most successful American film, loose, free-flowing, honest... so accurate and impressionistic in its view of nature, that you can smell the river and the dead rain after the flood that almost ends their struggle."—*Time Out*.

1945/b&w/92 min. | Scr/dir: Jean Renoir; w/ Zachary Scott, Betty Field, J. Carrol Naish, Beulah Bondi, Norman Lloyd.

Bing Theater | \$10 general admission. \$7 museum members, seniors (62+), students with valid ID.

The River

Saturday, March 20 | 9:20 pm

This sublime adaptation of a novel by Rumer Godden, who was raised in India and collaborated during the shoot, was a challenge to bring to the screen: the first Technicolor film shot in India, it involved heavy equipment and long delays in printing the dailies; the cast was almost entirely non-professional; local festivities and superstitions interfered with the normal pace of production; and the locations needed frequent adjustments to reflect a year of seasons. The story is narrated by Harriet, now an adult, who recalls her life in India at age fifteen, the year that Captain John came to visit; and through her eyes we follow the day to day routine of a British colonial family, share her adventures with her closest companions, an Indian girl and her little brother, contemplate the natural beauty and mysterious culture of a foreign land, and experience the pain and joy of first love. In time with the flow of the ever-present river, the film has a measured pace that chronicles life with its sudden bursts of tragedy and pleasure. "Like Rossellini's *Voyage to Italy* (1953), *The River* has survived falling out of fashion to re-emerge as a touchstone for a certain kind of modernity in cinema. It's a self-conscious, reflective film that draws on the "reality" of India but does so to immerse us in the spiritual drama of its central character. None of the principal characters in *The River* find immediate happiness; instead, they learn to overcome frustration and despair... Unlike conflict-centered Hollywood narratives, which invariably end in resolution, Renoir's films tend to show that not all problems are soluble."—Ian Christie.

1951/color/99 min. | Scr: Rumer Godden, Jean Renoir; dir: Jean Renoir; w/ Nora Swinburne, Patricia Walters, Thomas E. Breen. | Restored by The Academy Film Archive in cooperation with The British Film Institute and Janus Films. Restoration funding provided by The Film Foundation and The Hollywood Foreign Press Association. Bing Theater | \$10 general admission. \$7 museum members, seniors (62+), students with valid ID.

Grand Illusion

Friday, March 26 | 7:30 pm

Renoir became an international figure with the commercial success of *Grand Illusion* which was acclaimed for its pacifist and anti-war sentiments. Widely seen in Europe with the exception of Germany where the Jewish character was deleted and Italy where it was banned, the film played across America, remaining 15 weeks in a New York first run cinema, garnering both an Oscar nomination for Best Picture and the endorsement of FDR. The story, a series of dramatic episodes, each with its own shading propelled forward by the desire to escape, is set during WWI and centers on three French soldiers held in a fortress prison by the Germans—Lt. Maréchal (Gabin) a former auto mechanic, Captain de Boieldieu (Fresnay) a career officer, and Rosenthal (Dalio) a banker from a nouveau-riche Jewish family—who establish a friendship across class lines and a fraternity with the other French prisoners. The most striking relationship however is trans-border, between Boieldieu and Von Rauffenstein (von Stroheim), the German Commandant, who are bound by

their aristocratic lineage and their espousal of the values of a pre-war Europe. Von Stroheim, with his neck and chin clamped into a metal brace, is a powerful screen presence—the epitome of Prussian will—and his studied performance is unique in Renoir’s work. “Grand illusions are doubtless the dreams which help men to live. The theme of illusion is scattered throughout the film: the illusion of sexuality fostered by soldiers in women’s costumes; the illusion of liberty behind every attempt to escape; the illusion of approaching peace; the illusion of hatred that arbitrarily divides men who in reality are not separated by anything; and the illusion of boundaries and the wars which result from them.”—André Bazin

1937/b&w/104 min. | Scr: Charles Spaak, Jean Renoir; dir: Jean Renoir; w/ Jean Gabin, Dita Parlo, Pierre Fresnay, Erich von Stroheim

Bing Theater | \$10 general admission. \$7 museum members, seniors (62+), students with valid ID.

The Elusive Corporal

Friday, March 26 | 9:30 pm

A Parisian army corporal (Cassel) is captured when the Germans invade France but with the help of two friends and later alone, he goes to absurd lengths to break out of various Nazi prisons. By turns humorous and sentimental, this slight tale is informed with by Renoir's trademark humanism and the scenes in the prison camp display his sharp eye for regional and class differences, even under the yoke of common suffering. "Renoir is clearly not interested in how prisoners escape but why. Whereas *Grand Illusion* was concerned with the idea of fraternity, *The Elusive Corporal* is concerned with the idea of liberty. Whereas the earlier film suggested that class differences were more decisive than national differences, the later film suggests that liberty means something different for each man."—Andrew Sarris

1962/b&w/99 min. | Jean Renoir, Guy Lefrance; dir: Jean Renoir; w/ Jean-Pierre Cassel, Claude Brasseur, Claude Rich.

Bing Theater | \$10 general admission. \$7 museum members, seniors (62+), students with valid ID.

La chienne

Saturday, March 27 | 7:30 pm

Heading home late from an office party, Legrand, an unassuming clerk whose hobby as an amateur painter provides relief from a boring job and a shrewish wife, intervenes in an argument between Lulu, an attractive young woman, and Dédé, her inebriated companion and abusive pimp. Manipulated by the couple who plan to fleece the naïve old man, Legrand rents a comfortable apartment to house his illicit lover and to display his paintings, but happiness is short-lived: faced with mounting debts, the theft of his canvasses, and Lulu’s brazen betrayal, he descends into madness. Renoir’s first sound film is one of his most visually inventive: in the prologue, *Punch and Judy* puppets debate whether the film is a serious social drama or a comedy of manners; on occasion the camera moves outdoors to observe the action through the window; and mirrors and reflections are used throughout to visually underscore the pattern of hypocrisy, treachery and moral ambiguity. It is typical of Renoir that this

sordid melodrama, with its flawed creatures and immoral ending, is a film in which the dominant emotions are tenderness and pity.
1931/b&w/95 min. | Scr: Jean Renoir, Andre Girard; dir: Jean Renoir;
w/ Michel Simon, Janie Marèse, Georges Flamant
Bing Theater | \$10 general admission. \$7 museum members, seniors (62+), students with valid ID.

La Marseillaise

Saturday, March 27 | 9:15 pm

A neorealist fresco of the early days of the French Revolution, produced in the heady atmosphere of the leftist Popular Front and funded by the trade unions, *La Marseillaise* begins in Marseille where 500 volunteers are preparing to march to Paris to participate in the capture of the Tuileries and the fall of the monarchy. Around this historical episode Renoir depicts the lives of the protagonists who come from every segment of society; in the opinion of Francois Truffaut "he is careful to avoid the artifice and stiffness inherent in a period film... and succeeds perfectly in humanizing thirty or so major characters by using details from everyday reality." For the critic André Bazin, "Renoir demythologizes history by restoring it to man" noting that "the aristocrats are marvelously individualized... Renoir gives each character a precise and subtle style. The most developed from this point of view is Louis XVI." The same detail can be found in the dialogue: according to Truffaut, "is the richest in culinary vocabulary of any Renoir film" and Georges Sadoul wrote that "the Marseillaise troops were played by actors from the south of France, trained by Pagnol to speak dialect." Sadoul concludes by noting that "there is no idealization in the film and no dramatization; its impact lies in its naturalness, and its attempt to portray human details against a background of history."

1938/b&w/132 min. | Scr/dir: Jean Renoir; w/ Pierre Renoir, Lise Delamare, Louis Jouvet.

Bing Theater | \$10 general admission. \$7 museum members, seniors (62+), students with valid ID.

CREDIT LINES

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About LACMA

Since its inception in 1965, LACMA has been devoted to collecting works of art that span both history and geography—and represent Los Angeles' uniquely diverse population. Today, the museum features particularly strong collections of Asian, Latin American, European, and American art, as well as a new contemporary museum on its campus, BCAM. With this expanded space for contemporary art, innovative collaborations with artists, and an ongoing transformation project, LACMA is creating a truly modern lens through which to view its rich encyclopedic collection.

General Information: LACMA is located at 5905 Wilshire Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA, 90036. For more information about LACMA and its programming, call 323 857-6000 or visit lacma.org.

Museum Hours and Admission: Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday, 12-8 pm; Friday, 12-9 pm; Saturday and Sunday, 11 am-8 pm; closed Wednesday. Adults \$12; students 18+ with ID and senior citizens 62+ \$8; children 17 and under are admitted free. Admission (except to specially ticketed exhibitions) is free the second Tuesday of every month and on Target Free Holiday Mondays. Every evening after 5 pm, "Pay What You Wish."

Press Contact: For additional information, contact LACMA Press Relations at press@lacma.org or 323 857-6522.

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