



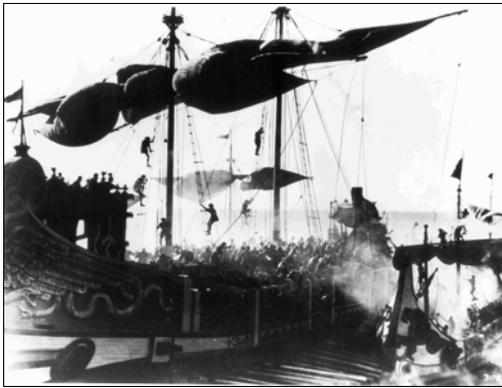
BEN-HUR

M-G-M (1925)

DIRECTED BY FRED NIBLO

CAST

Ben-Hur.... Ramon Novarro
Messala.... Francis X. Bushman
Esther.... May McAvoy
Mary.... Betty Bronson
Princess of Hur.... Claire McDowell
Tirzah.... Kathleen Key
Simonides Nigel De Brulier
Arrius Frank Currier



Producers.... Louis B Mayer and
Irving Thalberg

Additional Directors Christy Cabanne,
Alfred Raboch, Reeves Eason,
Charles Stallings, Ferdinand P Earle

Scenarists.... Bess Meredyth, Carey Wilson
Titles Katherine Hilliker, H.H. Caldwell
Photography.... René Guissart, Percy Hil-
burn, Karl Struss, Clyde deVinna

Technicolor Staff.... JA Ball, René Guissart,
Ervin Roy Musgrave, Wm Howard Green
Art Direction.... Cedric Gibbons, Horace
Jackson, Harold Grieve
Chief Film Editor Lloyd Nosler

Fully restored print, tinted with
Technicolor sequences
Duration: 141 minutes plus interval
Projection speed: variable
Aperture: Movietone

Score by
CARL DAVIS (69 players)



LIVE CINEMA

BEN-HUR

As a novel, *Ben-Hur* had sold almost as many copies as *The Bible*. It became a show-business legend when a huge stage production toured the US for years. Seeing its box office value, MGM spent a fortune making a film that came to define the term 'epic'. On reviewing it, *Variety* said 'It isn't a picture. It's the Bible!'

The first of the film's many highlights is a scintillating tableau of the birth of Christ, sparkling in Technicolor and highlighted here by Carl Davis's magisterial accompaniment. Another is the reconstruction of the area below decks on a Roman trireme and the vicious sea battle that catapults Ben-Hur from slave to hero. Shot off the coast of Italy, local extras actually fought, Fascist versus anti-Fascist, during filming and one of the triremes caught fire. Most famous of all is the magnificent chariot race in which Ben-Hur spectacularly wreaks vengeance on the Roman champion Messala. It remains to this day one of the greatest examples of action shooting in the history of cinema. Filmed in a seemingly enormous arena by forty-two cameras, it was a real race, attended by the whole of Hollywood, with stunt men and cowboys as charioteers. At the climax of the race two chariots tangled and the others ploughed into them one after another. Amazingly there were no fatalities but it makes for nail-biting viewing.

The actor playing Ben-Hur had to outshine these cinematic fireworks. Virtually every male star in Hollywood was tested and after a false start with another actor Ramon Novarro finally got the part. His good looks and athletic physique were shown to the full in Ben-Hur's many guises—Jewish prince, fugitive, galley slave and charioteer. But he proved himself far more than an action hero, fleshing out the role of loving son and brother with heart-rending sensitivity. Francis X Bushman is the perfect foil as the bullying Messala.

Reviews were enthusiastic and the public flocked to see the film, making it one of the biggest earners of the period. But MGM never recovered their enormous production costs. One company executive said, 'Nothing like it ever had been. Nothing like it ever will be. And nothing like it ever should have been.' But in prestige terms *Ben-Hur* was a triumph. It set a precedent for film-making on an epic scale that would become MGM's trade mark, making it for decades the most admired and successful motion picture company in the world.