



THE CAT AND THE CANARY

Universal Pictures 1927

Directed by

PAUL LENI

Presented by... Carl Laemmle

Scenario... Robert F. Hill,

Alfred A. Cohn

Titles...Walter Anthony

Photographer...Gilbert Warrenton

Sets...Charles D. Hall



CAST

Annabelle West ... Laura La Plante

Paul Jones ... Creighton Hale

Roger Crosby ... Tully Marshall

Charles Wilder ... Forrest Stanley

Cecily Young ... Gertrude Astor

Aunt Susan Sillsby ... Flora Finch

Harry Blythe ... Arthur Edmund Carew

Mammy Pleasant ... Martha Mattox

The Guard ... George Siegmann

Fully restored tinted print

Duration: 80mins

Projection speed: 22 fps

Aperture: Full Silent



Score by **NEIL BRAND**
(11 players including Theremin)



A wild stormy night— a group of eccentric guests arrive at a Gothic mansion summoned by a dead man's will. So far so familiar, but this is no ordinary old-dark-house thriller. An expressionist comedy of exaggerated perspective and camp characters, it is the first American film of German director Paul Leni. German film magazine *Der Film* described Leni as having 'an irresistible tendency towards the fantastic, the farcical and the horrendous...', *The Cat and the Canary* certainly bears this out.

An accomplished art director, prominent in the Expressionist movement, Leni was invited to Hollywood by Universal Pictures in 1926. He worked with Paul Kohner adapting for the screen John Willard's play, the spoof-horror *The Cat and the Canary; a Melodrama in Three Acts*. Leni's is the first of five film versions, the most famous being the zany 1939 production starring Bob Hope.

Exactly 20 years after his death, relatives of Cyrus West are invited to his mansion for the reading of a will. Considered mad by his family whilst alive, West wreaks revenge from the grave. He disinherits his next of kin leaving the estate to distant relative Annabelle West provided she is of sound mind. Having delivered the dead man's mischief, the lawyer is removed from the proceedings by a disembodied hand. The disgruntled guests are in uproar, suspicious of every bump and squeak but especially of Annabelle who fears for her own safety. Beset in the night by unwelcome guests and clutching hands, she must undergo a sanity test with a sinister doctor - enough to make anyone nervous! Is Annabelle mad? Is there a murderer at large? Does the ghost of Cyrus West still walk?

Much of the play's success depended on witty dialogue, but in his screen adaptation Leni achieves a strong sense of mood and mystery through set design and camera-work. New York Times critic Mordaunt Hall wrote, 'you feel that you are one of the characters in the haunted house.' A turreted mansion, a paneled gallery lined by family portraits, secret passages, skeins of cobwebs, billowing curtains, flickering shadows ... the camera films through books on a shelf or the carved wooden backs of chairs, giving the feeling of imprisonment. The film was so successful that it became the prototype for Hollywood Gothic, the atmospheric, architectural style adopted by Universal in their classic horror movies of the 1930s, *Dracula*, *Frankenstein*, *The Mummy*.