



Flesh and the Devil

MGM 1926

Directed by

Cast

Leo von Harden... John Gilbert
Felicitas von Rhaden... Greta Garbo
Ulrich von Eltz... Lars Hanson
Hertha... Barbara Kent
Pastor Voss... George Fawcett



Screenplay... Benjamin F. Glazer
Photography... William Daniels
Film editor... Lloyd Nosler
Art directors...
Cedric Gibbons & Frederic Hope
Titles... Marian Ainslee

Duration: 112mins
Projection speed: variable
Aperture: full

Score by Carl Davis
(60 players)



LIVE CINEMA

FLESH AND THE DEVIL

In a romantic landscape of gothic castles, dense forests and hidden lakes, Leo and Ulrich grew up together and pledged life-long friendship. They both joined the Prussian army as Hussars. Making the most of the privileges of their class, they share a carefree existence until they meet Felicitas von Rhaden, an alluring older woman. At a ball given in his honour, Leo shows his fascination for Felicitas and, regardless of prying eyes or protocol, the two make love. Their brief encounter becomes a passionate love affair until discovered by Count von Rhaden, Felicitas' husband. His family's honour tainted, the Count demands satisfaction. Leo survives the duel but must leave the country. His obsession with Felicitas endures a long separation. Unfortunately she is less constant. On returning to Germany, Leo finds her married to Ulrich. Distraught, he ends his friendship with Ulrich. On the pretext of reuniting the friends, Felicitas requests a meeting with Leo. She is successful in her mission and in her underlying motive, to rekindle their affair. They plan to run away together. Ulrich returns unexpectedly from a business trip bringing Felicitas a diamond bracelet, reminding her of the life she would forego in exile with Leo. She is unwilling to make the sacrifice. Leo is devastated and rages at her. Ulrich discovers them and demands a duel. The two friends face each other at dawn on the snow covered Isle of Friendship. Once again Felicitas has endangered the lives of her lover and husband. She at last feels remorse and attempts to cross the snowy wastes of the lake to prevent the tragedy. The ice breaks and she disappears in the icy waters. Leo and Ulrich falter, realising that their friendship is more important than Felicitas.

The film was based on a novel by Hermann Sudermann, *The Undying Past*, a gothic work about friendship. Director Clarence Brown and MGM script writer, Benjamin Glazer, enhanced the drama with the role of a woman – Greta Garbo. John Gilbert and Lars Hanson played the dashing young heroes. Gilbert was a leading romantic idol and Garbo had to settle for second billing – for the last time in her career. The film made her a star and she and Gilbert fell passionately in love. Their many scenes together sizzle with their off-and-on-screen chemistry. Risqué for its time, the film proved virtually censor proof because its sexy scenario was set in a foreign land. It also conformed by having Felicitas – both flesh and the devil in the film – die at the end.

Carl Davis's score reflects the late-romantic period in which the film is set. However, like the film, he wanted to capture Garbo's elusive and timeless quality so uses a more advanced harmonic style.