

# GARBO

(2005)

A PHOTOPLAY PRODUCTION for  
TURNER CLASSIC MOVIES

Directed by **KEVIN BROWNLOW**  
**CHRISTOPHER BIRD**

Produced by **PATRICK STANBURY**

Original Music **CARL DAVIS**



Narrated by **JULIE CHRISTIE**

INTERVIEWEES INCLUDE: Cari Beauchamp, Charles Busch, Lydie Denier, Sam Green, Leatrice Gilbert Fountain, James Karen, Gavin Lambert, John Lax, Joseph Newman, Barry Paris, Derek Reisfield, Donald Reisfield, Gray Reisfield, Scott Reisfield, Daniel Selznick, Karen Swensen, Gore Vidal, Mark Vieira



*Including clips from:*

- *A WOMAN OF AFFAIRS* (1928)
- *ANNA CHRISTIE (USA)* (1930)
- *ANNA CHRISTIE (GER)* (1930)
- *ANNA KARENINA* (1935)
- *CAMILLE* (1937)
- *FLESH AND THE DEVIL* (1926)
- *GRAND HOTEL* (1932)
- *GOSTA BERLING SAGA* (1922)
- *LOVE* (1927)
- *THE MYSTERIOUS LADY* (1928)
- *NINOTCHKA* (1939)
- *THE KISS* (1929)
- *THE PAINTED VEIL* (1934)
- *THE SINGLE STANDARD* (1929)
- *THE TEMPTRESS* (1926)
- *THE TORRENT* (1921)
- *WILD ORCHIDS* (1929)

**RUNNING TIME: 85 minutes**



# GARBO

Making a documentary about Garbo a hundred years after her birth was frustrating because the people who worked with her were virtually all gone. Luckily the films all survived –except one – and because Turner own the MGM library, we were given whatever we needed. The challenge then became one of doing justice to this amazing actress.

It is impossible to recreate the impact this incredibly beautiful girl had on her first audiences in the 1920s. Fortunately, she fell in love with the leading actor at MGM, John Gilbert, and Gilbert's daughter Leatrice and journalist Adela Rogers St Johns convey the impact of that as a kind of parallel. For an entire generation fell in love with Garbo and they devoured everything that was written about her – true or false. The fact that a photographer lay in wait for her for the best part of twenty years, is an indication of the public hunger for news of her, for glimpses of her, as late as the 70s and 80s.

We were fortunate to have a unique interview with Mimi Pollak, Garbo's first friend at acting school. She was filmed as part of our Cinema Europe series by director Michael Winterbottom, who is a specialist in Swedish cinema, having made a trilogy of documentaries on Ingmar Bergman. He also brought back an amazing range of footage of Sweden and its film studios. One of the advertising shorts with which Garbo began her career was one showing her at a rooftop café in Stockholm, while at a nearby table is the celebrated actor Lars Hanson, her future leading man in Sweden and Hollywood.

Legend has it that photos taken by Arnold Genthe transformed MGM's attitude to this new arrival, but this story appears to have been written by Genthe; MGM already knew what they had. However, when she arrived at Culver City, cameraman William Daniels was asked to do a test. It was a Sunday and he was anxious to get to a game of golf: his test was merely adequate. Lillian Gish suggested that her cameraman, Henrik Sartov, use his special LG lens. To demonstrate the difference, we used that original LG lens on Lydie Denier, an actress who plays Garbo on the stage.

Curiously, the studio did not give her Sartov, but William Daniels. And even more curiously, Daniels quickly became the ideal cameraman for her, a master of lighting who was also a master of tact and diplomacy.

She had several favourite directors – George Cukor, Rouben Mamoulian and Ernst Lubitsch – but Clarence Brown made more films with Garbo than anyone else. We had access to a unique interview, shot in 1969, in which Brown spoke with affection and admiration of this extraordinary girl.

The most astonishing thing this young girl did was to take on Louis B Mayer – and win. Louis B Mayer's grandson, and the son of David O Selznick, Daniel Selznick tells us how his grandfather wanted to be the most important person in Garbo's life, and how he resented the close relationship she had with her mentor, Mauritz Stiller.

Sound, which did so much to destroy the careers of great stars like John Gilbert, enhanced Garbo's. Audience who laughed when John Gilbert resorted to theatrical enunciation were impressed by Garbo's sensual voice. It fit her to perfection, its foreignness adding to the mystique.. Sound boosted her career.

However, she found working in films incredibly hard and took as much time off as she could get away with. There was a period when her contract expired while she was in Sweden and MGM were obliged to agree to her terms to get her back –she wanted to make Queen Christina. And as if to humiliate the studio she insisted on the one man they did not want – John Gilbert.

We had the benefit of no less than three of Garbo's biographers – Barry Paris, Karen Swenson and the latest, Mark Vieira. Mark Vieira is a photographer as well as an author and his studio is in the same picturesque old building as the celebrated photographer George Hurrell. He was able to demonstrate lighting technique, while our cameraman Patrick Loungway filmed with his vintage Mitchell, using stock which had passed its sell-by date sixty years before.