



Nosferatu

Prana Film 1921

Directed by F. W. Murnau



CAST

Count Orlok Max Schreck
Hutter Gustav von Wangenheim
Ellen Greta Schroeder
Westenra.... Georg Heinrich Schnell
Lucy Ruth Landshoff
Professor Sievers Gustav Botz
Knock Alexander Granach
Professor Bulwer John Gottowt
Captain Max Nemetz

Producers.... Albin Grau;
Enrico Dieckmann
Script Henrick Galeen
Cameraman F. A. Wagner
Designs and Costumes Albin Grau

Duration: 88 minutes
Projection speed: variable
Aperture: full

Score by James Bernard
(70 players)



LIVE CINEMA



NOSFERATU

We are perennially attracted to vampires in general, and to one vampire in particular: Count Dracula, created by Bram Stoker for his novel published in 1897. FW. Murnau based *Nosferatu*, the first vampire film, on this book. But Murnau's film makes the vampire more universal, extending it far from the narrow confines of Victorian England in which Stoker's story is set. Orlok lives in a medieval landscape of mountains and ruined castles. His scourge is the plague, like the Black Death of the Middle Ages. He is contaminated, unclean, and is purged by purity and sacrifice. Murnau ended his film with this religious and scientific surety, in sharp contrast to the uncertainty of the post-war era, when the film was made.

The film is full of evocative and unforgettable images. Murnau and designer Albin Grau recreated the world as seen by the nineteenth century German Romantic painters. Scenes of the natural world hinting at the unseen and the powerful force of nature. To reinforce this sense Murnau filmed in the open air on location. Orlok's kingdom was filmed in the Carpathian mountains, his castle on a high promontory amongst dense forest land. The scenes in Wisborg were filmed in the medieval town of Lubeck. Some of the most potent images are seascapes shot on the Baltic coast of Germany; Ellen looking out to sea, waves rolling against the shore, a ship sailing inexorably towards us.

The ship carries Orlok from his kingdom of shades to the real world. He dominates the film with a pervading sense of evil. Max Schreck's Orlok is far removed from the suave seducer Dracula would become in later films. He is more monster than man. Tall and skeletal, his rat face protrudes from misshapen shoulders. He moves with feral furtiveness but at times with great dynamism. On first sighting, his phantom coach travels with astonishing speed. Later, he packs his coffins with the same super-human haste. On arriving in Wisborg he crosses the cathedral square with giant steps and cat-like grace. Although the least sexy of movie vampires, Orlok is overtly sexual. His most potent move is his ascent to Ellen's bedroom when his giant shadow glides upstairs, talons fully extended. For all his otherworldliness, at this moment Orlok is a sexual creature primed for the ultimate sexual encounter. Oddly, it is the lachrymose and passive Ellen who undertakes a mantis-like vigil and proves his nemesis.

Whether it be on account of the paranormal or the sexual, *Nosferatu* continues to fascinate. A recent feature film was made about it - *Shadow of a Vampire*, a black comedy in which Max Schreck /Orlok is a real vampire. So weird was the actual making of Murnau's film that the story need not have been embellished upon. The designer, Albin Grau, was obsessed with the occult and a friend of the master of the black arts, Aleistair Crowley, then dubbed 'the most evil man in the world'. Grau made frequent use of cabalistic and astrological symbols in the film: the opening title shows an evil eye. The film caused trouble as soon as it was released. The rights to Stoker's book had not been cleared so the author's widow took the film company to court and won an order to destroy all copies. True to its vampire status, *Nosferatu* proved indestructible and re-emerged years later. This print is the latest and most complete restoration by the Münchner Filmmuseum and the Cineteca del Comune di Bologna. Tinted and toned, the original title designs have been used for the new English translation. The score is the last film work of James Bernard. Bernard took his cue from the film's subtitle, 'a symphony of horrors'. He composed what he described as a symphonic poem, a web of contrasting themes. Throughout is Bernard's inimitable musical voice as heard in countless Hammer Films productions.