



SUNRISE

A SONG OF TWO HUMANS

William Fox 1927

Directed by F. W. Murnau

Cast

The Man George O'Brien
The Wife Janet Gaynor
Woman from the City
Margaret Livingston
The Maid Bodil Rosing
The Photographer
J. Farrell MacDonald

Scenario Carl Mayer
Photography Charles Rosher,
Karl Struss
Art Director Rochus Gliese
Titles Katherine Hilliker,
H. H. Caldwell
Editor Harold Schuster
Assistant Art Directors
Edgar Ulmer,
Alfred Metscher

Duration 91 minutes
Projection speed Variable
Aperture Movietone

Original music by
Hugo Riesenfeld
Restored by Nic Raine



LIVE CINEMA



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Sunrise is Murnau's first American film. He had left Germany seeking creative freedom and was given just that by William Fox. *Sunrise* was made in a rarified atmosphere of no time limits or budgetary restrictions. This new environment inspired Murnau to make what was described at time as the pinnacle of German silent film-making. On seeing this restoration in 1995 Jonathon Romney, film critic of *The Guardian*, wrote, '*Sunrise* is something at once ancient and spanking new. The scale is both monolithic and intimate... It looks now as daring a venture in modernism as it must have been in its day.'

Murnau had written to William Fox that he wanted to make 'a film about the alienation of the modern city.' The story of *Sunrise* is taken from *The Trip to Tilsit*, a novel by Hermann Sudermann. Murnau and scenario writer Carl Mayer transformed the original story. They abstracted it, setting it in an unidentified land. The Country and The City become symbols of innocence and sophistication. They reduced the characters to The Man, The Wife and The Woman from the City. The Woman from the City seduces The Man. Murnau uses The Man and The Wife's trip to the city to chart their emotional journey. Edgar Ulmer who worked on the translation of the script from German said, 'Mayer had written it like a poem, one scene per page. He had put an incredible amount of love into this script.'

Murnau was a perfectionist as was his art director Rochus Gliese. Gliese constructed sets with false perspective that only allowed for one point of view. A new set was constructed for each scene. The production proved to be very costly for Fox and although the film was a success at the box office, it failed to break even. Murnau lost his 'carte-blanche' status.

Sunrise was premiered in New York using the Movietone sound system. This was thought to be the future of sound: not talkies *per se* but silent pictures with the finest music on a separate sound track. Hugo Riesenfeld, musical director at New York's Rialto, Rivoli and Roxy cinemas, was the composer. His movie/music productions were described as 'photoplays deluxe'. His score for *Sunrise* is an elaborate compilation and widely recognised as a vital element of the film. For this version the score has been reconstructed from the original soundtrack by Nic Raine, there being no surviving printed edition. Freed from the limitations of early recording systems, it is now possible to hear even more clearly the contribution that Riesenfeld made to Murnau's masterpiece.