

WINGS

Paramount, 1927
directed by
William Wellman



Cast

Mary Preston: Clara Bow
Jack Powell: Charles 'Buddy' Rogers
David Armstrong: Richard Arlen
Sylvia Lewis: Jobyna Ralston
Cadet White: Gary Cooper
Hermann Schwimpf: El Brendel
Mrs Armstrong: Julia Swayne Gordon
Mr Armstrong: Henry B Walthall
Mr Powell: George Irving
Mrs Powell: Hedda Hopper

Story: John Monk Saunders
Photography: Harry Perry
Editor: E Lloyd Sheldon

A tinted print
Duration: 139 minutes plus interval
Projection speed: standard
Aperture: full

Score by Carl Davis
(45 players)



LIVE CINEMA

WINGS

As a film about the American Air Corps, *Wings* is nothing if not authentic. Both its writer, John Monk Saunders, and its director, William Wellman, were pilots during World War I. The film glorifies flying and even by modern standards the aerial sequences are spectacular. All the scenes of the actors flying were shot in the air, with cameras mounted on planes. The US War Department provided unprecedented cooperation including the supply of 3,500 troops for the climactic Battle of St. Mihiel. An extraordinary action film with its scenes of death-defying dog-fights, wrestling brawls and drinking bouts, at its core it has a tragic theme: the loss of friendship tempered only by redeeming love. The film won the first ever Academy Award for Best Picture.

Jack Powell and David Armstrong both fall for new-girl-in-town, Sylvia, leaving Jack blind to the affections of the girl-next-door, Mary. Both boys enlist in the air corps and manage to overcome their mutual jealousy. They make a formidable fighting team and become inseparable. On leave in Paris, Jack meets Mary but is too drunk to recognize her. Recalled to the front, David is shot down behind enemy lines but survives. Believing his friend dead, Jack takes to the air to avenge him. He shoots down a lone German plane but discovers too late that the pilot was David. Jack returns home to make his confession to Jack's distraught parents. His only solace is the buoyant spirit of the girl-next-door...

Paramount populated the film with young, good-looking 'starlets' led by the IT girl Clara Bow. She plays against type as the faithful Mary. Charming throughout, we catch a glimpse of her flapper persona in the scenes at the Folies Bergères where, in a beaded dress, she sparkles like champagne bubbles. The antithesis of Clara's fizz, Jobyna Ralston floats serenely in a cloud of ringlets and georgette as the girl of the boys' dreams. Richard Arlen and Buddy Rogers are typically clean cut and full of pep and are joined briefly by a young Gary Cooper, already moody and brooding as the ill-fated Cadet White. Henry B. Walthall, veteran of D. W. Griffith's early epics, gives a heart-rending performance as David's grieving father.