



Book now for Launceston Viewing Day Deadline extended to Mon 22 April



Western event: Sunday 28 April at Launceston Town Hall, Cornwall.
Full details of the programme and venues are in the March edition of Film South West. [Download it.](#)
A booking form is attached. Don't delay, to be sure of a place book now.
The future of events in the West of our region such as this, depends on the support
of groups in Cornwall & Devon. So be sure to book.

Scoring Silents

When the Lumiere brothers first demonstrated film in 1895 in Paris, they used a piano player to accompany the action on screen. The pianist would watch the screen and capture the changes of mood. Later, when cinemas became established, owners tried a variety of methods to add sound to film, prompted by the need to mask the noise made by the crude projectors playing the film. However it soon became obvious that that sound actually enhanced the audience's enjoyment of a film. Cinema owners soon realised that the most cost effective way of providing sound was to employ live musicians. The size of the venue would often determine the amount of musicians – for example a small cinema might have just a piano or maybe an accompanying violinist, whereas deluxe cinema palaces may have as many as 80.

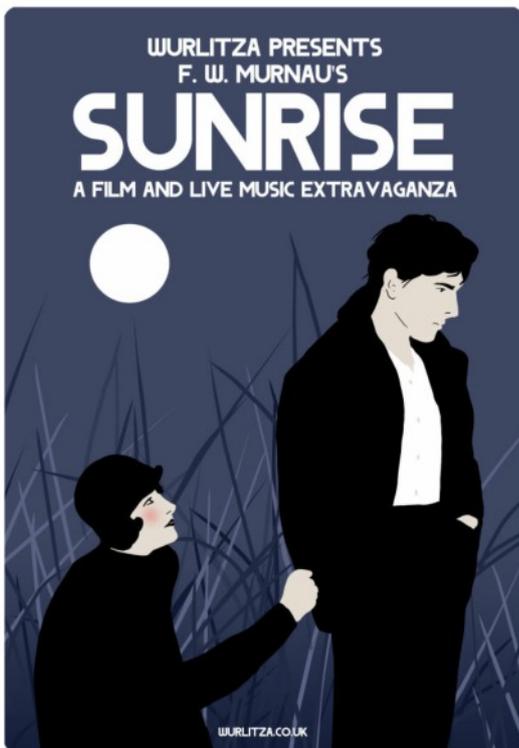


Piano accompaniment wasn't always appreciated. An article in *The Musician* reported, "The instrument is generally old, out of tune, strings dusty, and incapable of producing the correct vibrations. The stool has no back and the pianist plays for hours with their back becoming constantly more strained. The light, both night and day, is poor and inadequate, forcing the pianist either to play by

memory, ear or incorrectly by notes they strive to make out." In fact as early as 1909 an editorial in *Moving Picture World* implored cinema owners to either tune the pianos or, more dramatically, burn them.

The piano accompanist's job was by no means easy. Most of the time the musicians did not have time to see the films they were going to accompany and would have to guess as to the mood, timing, tempo and scene changes. Joseph Gershenson (who later became the musical director at Universal Studios) said of his experiences as a film accompanist in the 1920s, "I worked in little theatres with just a violin and piano. When I played the silent movies in the small theatres, they had a big machine with pulleys. If you wanted a rooster crow, you'd pull one button. If you wanted an auto horn, you'd pull another. And the pianist used to do all that. These things were all set up. It was an old Wurlizer machine, a big machine, attached to a piano. A knock at the door, or a telephone bell, another lever. The pianist would have cue sheets for it." Many famous musicians and composers got their start in the music world as a film accompanist, such as pianist Fats Waller. Even the Russian composer Dmitri Shostakovich endured a gruelling stint at a movie house as a young man. In a letter, his wife recalled in 1924, "Down in front of the screen sat [Dmitri], his back soaked with perspiration, his near-sighted eyes in their horn-rimmed glasses peering upwards to follow the story, his fingers pounding away on the raucous upright piano. Late at night he trudged home in a thin coat and summer cap, with now warm gloves or galoshes, and arrived exhausted around one o'clock in the morning..."

Silent movie musicians disappeared during the late 1920s. After taking a chance with a system that allowed records to sync up with a reel of film, Warner Brothers released the film *The Jazz Singer* starring Al Jolson, with the tag "All singing, all talking" and with no need for accompanying musicians. It was followed shortly by Walt Disney's iconic animated short *Steamboat Willie* and its huge success indicated that sound in film was well and truly in demand by the public. Some studios were still making silents (Charlie Chaplin, for example, refused to convert) but by early 1930s all the silent cinemas had either converted to sound or went out of business. Today we are occasionally treated to screenings of silent films with live scoring and it often proves a unique and refreshing experience.



One band that provides accompaniment with a contemporary twist is Wurlitza. ([Website.](#))

Lizzy Stroud from Wurlitza says "This Summer we will be playing five short films at Glastonbury Festival. (26-30 June. [Website.](#)) We're very much enjoying scoring the shorts, which are requiring a very different approach to the one we are used to, and offering us plenty of variety. We'll be doing some comedies, including One Week by Buster Keaton, so there's lots of opportunity for sound effects, and also some non fiction films. One particularly poignant documentary is a beautiful short about harvesting wheat in Cornwall. The most unusual film we are working on is a Russian insect animation from 1912, The Cameraman's Revenge, which is very cleverly filmed using a variety of insects and amphibians, including beetles, grasshoppers, a dragonfly and even a frog. We'll be debuting the shorts at the Pilton Palais Cinema Tent at Glastonbury, then again at the end of July at Port Eliot Festival in Cornwall. (25-28 July. [Website.](#)) We then anticipate being able to offer an evening of short films in the Autumn, and will also be using them as warm up pictures to the longer films we currently

offer, so that venues wanting an interval for refreshments will be able to have one without breaking up the main feature."

Do you know of musicians that provide live accompaniment to silent films? Mail this information to loofilms@gmail.com and it will be published in Film South West.

Watch a [Youtube video](#) of an LA Times item on the importance of musical accompaniment during the silent movie era.

RECORD RESULTS AT SHIPHAM SW VIEWING - LAUNCESTON TOWN HALL NEXT STOP!

The first leg of the South West Group's Spring Viewing attracted over seventy organisers from twenty South West Community Cinemas and Film Societies. The hosts, Shipham Community Cinema provided their usual welcoming atmosphere in the Village Hall with good food, great cakes and film quiz. The selection of six new digital releases, didn't disappoint either, with some of the highest reactions recorded at recent SW Viewings. The line-up included some obvious choices for next season like the multiple Oscar winning Green Book but also less well-known titles such as The Guilty from Denmark and an up-lifting Swiss comedy drama, The Divine Order as well as Cannes Palme d'Or winner Shoplifters, all of which may find their way onto many community cinema programmes. The full results will be available later in May but five of the six titles scored over 86% and the top title a record 95%.

The same six titles, which were so well-received at Shipham, are to be screened at Launceston on Sunday 28th April. This will be the seventh event organized by the SW Group in the West of the region to allow organisers of venues in Cornwall and Devon to preview new titles and meet other enthusiasts. This will be our third time at Launceston Town Hall and we are pleased to be collaborating once again with Carn to Cove and hope that many C Fyln organisers will join us. Full details of the films, including trailers, are to be found on the [SW website](#) .

Cinema For All Registered Office: Unit 411, The Workstation, 15 Paternoster Row Sheffield S1 2BX

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