

TO PROTECT AND PRESERVE

Euro companies' archival efforts keep passion alive

By ED MEZA

For such leading Euro players as Pathe, StudioCanal and Gaumont, film restoration not only ensures that cinematic treasures endure for generations but also makes movies long out of circulation available to modern auds via new distribution channels.

The fest will honor Warner Home Video this year to commemorate the launch of its Warner Archives online platform in the U.S. and France, offering cinema lovers the opportunity to see little-known films in DVD or VOD versions. In announcing the tribute, the fest touted Warner as "the studio that most actively works to preserve and update film heritage."

Institut Lumiere general manager Thierry Fremaux says growing public demand and the recent development of the market has been "great news" for endangered classics, demonstrating that the public is willing to learn about the history of filmmaking. "The more the audience grows, the more the studios and production companies get motivated to offer new products," he says.

"The most important thing is that the films continue to be preserved, but also that the public, in particular the younger generation, be educated in knowing and loving them and keeping the passion alive," Fremaux adds.



"Children of Paradise," with Jean-Louis Barrault, and "A Trip to the Moon" are set to dazzle new auds with restored prints.



Trip to the Moon," "Films only exist in the eyes of those who watch them, and if nobody shows the films, then all this work is for nothing."

According to Paris-based Lobster Films chief Serge Bromberg, who partnered with the Groupama Gan and Technicolor foundations on the half-million-dollar-plus restoration of a rare color print of Georges Melies' 1902 sci-fi classic "A

It's a sentiment shared by Sophie Seydoux, president of the Jerome Seydoux-Pathe Foundation, which oversees Pathe's silent film catalog.

"It is so, so important to give back to the young ones

the desire to see these old movies," says Seydoux. "No movie should be lost. It's something I believe very deeply."

To that end, the Pathe Foundation is fostering the restoration of many of the films in its own silent movie library, which consists of roughly 3,500 titles already painstakingly catalogued by the company — just 40% of the 9,000 films Pathe produced up to 1930.

The Foundation is currently working to make the library available via an online movie platform, set to launch in 2012.

Pathe selects approximately five films a year for high-quality restoration, says exec VP Marc Lacan. "But, apart from that, Pathe has a very active digitization program which involves every year a much bigger number of films."

In addition to fixing up Marcel Carne's "Children of Paradise," which screens at Lumiere, the Foundation recently helped restore and release two DVD sets collecting the early works of silent-era filmmaker Albert Capellani, partnering with the Cinematheque Francaise, Cineteca di Bologna and curator Mariann Lewinsky.

Also quite active in the film preservation effort are Gaumont and StudioCanal. The former has 10 pics in the festival, while StudioCanal has restored 2,000 of the more than 5,000 titles in its library, according to technical department head Beatrice Valbin-Constant.

At StudioCanal, "All films are preserved and our policy is to restore two titles per year," she says. While preserving film heritage is one of the main criteria, special occasions, such as festival screenings and anniversary releases, also merit restorations.

All of StudioCanal's restored films are released on DVD and Blu-ray, with key titles booking festivals around the world and theatrical engagements as well, Valbin-Constant says. "We want to offer the widest exposition to our restored films," she says. "The best thing to create strong interest on a restored film is to make an event of the release."

CELLULOID SPOTLIGHT: Lumiere lineup includes new looks at Jacques Becker, Jerry Schatzberg and Photoplay Prods.

Everything old is new again at the Grand Lyon Lumiere Festival, which offers a smorgasbord of new prints and restored cinematic delights, ranging from a color version of Georges Melies' "A Trip to the Moon" to the French classic "War of the Buttons," which Gaumont restored in advance of two competing remakes.

With its spectacle freshly polished, William Wyler's "Ben-Hur" unspools in a single exclusive showing as part of the fest's tribute to Warner Home Video simultaneously with the screening at the New York Festival (and before its bow at the Rome Film Festival).

The fest's many showcases include a complete retrospective of French filmmaker Jacques Becker, admired by the

likes of Francois Truffaut and Jean Luc Godard, featuring 13 restored prints. "Like Melville, I'm sure his genius will become appreciated Stateside as well," fest topper Thierry Fremaux predicts.

Hollywood helmer William Wellman gets a similar treatment of 13 pics, among them restored versions of 1928's "Beggars of Life," with Louise Brooks and Wallace Beery, and "The Story of G.I. Joe."

As part of a tribute to film historians and restorers Kevin Brownlow and Patrick Stanbury of London-based Photoplay Prods., the fest will also screen Rex Ingram's "The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse" (1921) with musical accompaniment by the Lyon National Orchestra.

Among the more recent works unspooling at the fest are new prints of Jerry Schatzberg's 1970 drama "Puzzle of a Downfall Child" and Martin Rosen's animated canine adventure "The Plague Dogs" (1982). Jean-Paul Rappeneau's 1975 romantic comedy "Le sauvage," with Catherine Deneuve and Yves Montand, screens in the fest's 1970s' Deja classique sidebar.

Lumiere also continues its exploration of Asian cinema, and promises movie mayhem with a series on Japanese yakuza gangster pics from the 1960s through the 1980s, including Masahiro Shinoda's "Pale Flower" as well as new prints of Kinji Fukasaku's "Battles Without Honour and Humanity" and Hideo Gohsha's "The Yakuza Wives." — Ed Meza



"Ben-Hur"