

Flesh and the Devil (1926)

A Music Note by
Organist Russ Peck



Flesh and the Devil is a dramatic, funny, but most importantly, romantic motion picture. Most people know who Greta Garbo was, and many have encountered the name John Gilbert. A much publicized, genuine romance flowered during the filming of *Flesh*, so much so that the crew had to awkwardly wait while Greta and John finished their “scene,” long after the cameras stopped rolling!

This movie was a big deal when released, with much publicity, premieres and all the ballyhoo we love Hollywood for. Given all this, the musical accompaniment must have been first rate. It seems, regrettably, that we may never know. My research turned up no leads regarding the original score, so I contacted my friend and colleague, Greg Breed, for help. Greg's knowledge of silent movie music history is vast, so I figured that he might come up with some leads for me.

No such luck. After spending the better part of a day trolling through his sources, he came up with nothing. To quote Greg, “It's as if the movie never existed!” There may be someone out there that has information that we can't find. Please, let us know if you do!

So, as has happened before, it falls to me to create a score for this movie. Those of you that saw our last Fox Theatre Film Series offering, *Cyrano de Bergerac* (1923), will recall that a great deal of my score was French in origin, in keeping with the French flavor of the film. *Flesh and the Devil* appears to be set just before World War I in the Austro-Hungarian empire. With this information, I feel justified in pulling music from the great Austrian, Hungarian and Austro-Hungarian composers.

These nationalities have given us many musical greats, including Liszt, Schubert, Mahler and several others. In addition to this august group of composers, I have my collection of Photoplay Music (music written specifically for silent film accompaniment), popular music of the era, and my own compositions/improvisations to pull from.

As my score is still a work in progress at this writing, I offer no specifics here. I will be telling you about the main themes before the performance, but feel free to come visit me at the organ console after the show for the finer details!

