

THE PASSION OF JOAN OF ARC

(with a soundtrack of Anton Bruckner's music)

Joan of Arc

Joan of Arc is a French patron saint, and is revered for her role in leading France to several important victories against the English during the Hundred Years' War. As a child she claimed to have visions from saints telling her to drive the English out of France. She was finally captured and tried by French priests who were allied to the English. She was convicted for heresy and burnt at the stake at 19 in 1431. 20 years later she was posthumously rehabilitated by the Catholic Church, and declared a saint in 1920.

If you want to find out more about Joan of Arc, I can recommend the very readable book *Joan of Arc: The Story of Jehanne Darc* by Lili Wilkinson, a local author.

The Film

Numerous films have been made about Joan of Arc, with the greatest being "The Passion of Joan of Arc", a 1928 French film production directed by the Danish Carl Theodor Dreyer, who was already considered one of the great directors of his time.

Like the Passion story of Christ, this film depicts a trial and execution, and the director has paralleled some elements of Joan's suffering with Christ's. In the script, the director used transcripts from Joan of Arc's trial with her actual words, such as Joan's famous answer to the judges' question: "Are you in a state of grace?", to which she replied "If I am, may God keep me there. If I am not, may God grant it to me". Though the trial took place over many weeks, for dramatic effect, Dreyer compresses the action into a single day.

This is one of the most important of all films; nothing else like this was being done. There are some astounding innovations with extensive close-up shots to depict Joan's suffering. The priest judges and the guards are demonstrated by being shot from below to demonstrate their power. Sometimes we only see part of the faces, or they are shot off-centre, and a couple of times, the camera even shoots upside down. In a break with convention, none of the actors wear make-up, so that we get to see their expressions more clearly. There are also some deliberate surrealistic touches, such as a man wearing glasses in the 15th century, and the weird angles in the set's design.

The performance Renee Maria Falconetti as Joan of Arc, is sometimes called cinema's greatest acting performance. The director often made her kneel for long periods on a stone floor and repeatedly reshot scenes to get the right look of suffering. In fact, after these experiences, Falconetti thought that film acting was so difficult, that she never acted in a film again.

The Recovery of the Film

Despite critical acclaim, the film did poorly at the box office, and was censored and cut in various countries. Like Joan of Arc the original master copy of the film and a second recreated master copy were both destroyed by fire. The film's reputation

rested only on various corrupted and partially complete versions. Astoundingly, in 1981, a pristine copy of the original master was found in an abandoned cupboard in a Norwegian hospital. Apparently a doctor had ordered a copy to screen for patients and staff at the hospital, after which the film had been put in a cupboard and forgotten. This original copy has been restored and is what you are seeing on the DVD.

Silent films

The Passion of Joan of Arc is a silent film, so there is no synchronised dialogue or sound effects. Silent films usually have more expressive, even exaggerated acting. Many early film actors were trained in the theatre, and so carried over that style of acting. Also, not having dialogue required them to express emotions more with their gestures.

To assist the storytelling, intertitles were used in silent films. The Passion of Joan of Arc uses French intertitles (and I've encoded English subtitles). Also music scores were often composed, and there were live musical accompaniments during the entire film screening (in contrast to films with dialogue, in which music is more intermittent).

Melbourne Cinematheque

The director never specified an official film soundtrack. Over the decades, various soundtracks have been composed for the film's screenings. One story goes that if any music was to be used, Dreyer would like that of the mighty Austrian symphonist Anton Bruckner (1824-96), who is perhaps the greatest composer of symphonies and choral masses since the time of Beethoven and Schubert. Noting this, the Melbourne Cinematheque, a local organisation dedicated to the screening of classic films, decided to follow through on this. They asked local composer, Ross Campbell, to edit a soundtrack using Bruckner's music. I saw the film with this soundtrack nearly 5 years ago, and it was stunning – a magnificent film, with majestic music.

Putting the film and the music together

I wanted to reproduce this experience for myself, so when it was screened again in 2008, I took notes of the music used in the film. It was tricky to write notes in the dark, you also need to recognise the music being used for each scene quite quickly – you can't ask for pauses or rewinds! Bruckner is my favourite composer, and I know his music well, but it still required much concentration.

However, I was still stuck: I had no idea how to edit film or music files or even how to start. This changed a few months ago, when doing something unrelated, I acquired some of the skills I required while teaching myself extract film files from DVDs and encoding new subtitles onto foreign films.

I then worked out a timeline of what music should go with the various scenes. I based it mostly on what the Melbourne Cinematheque had done, but I made some changes that I thought fitted the action better. Finally, with the help of my friend Jay, who has better video editing software, we put the film and the music files together. I can hardly thank Jay enough.

Below is a summary of the software I used to assist me:

Task	Software/Freeware used
Extracting film off DVD + Converting to AVI	DVD Fab
Extracting subtitles off DVD	SubRip
Modifying subtitles	Subtitle Workshop
Combining film file with subtitles	Virtual Dub
Extracting music off CDs	FreeRip
Combining film file and editing music files	Adobe Premiere Pro
Burning film to DVD	NeroVision Express

The recordings and the music

This soundtrack differs from most soundtracks composed for silent films. Silent film soundtracks can involve repetition – this repeats little music. Unlike a composed soundtrack, it won't match the action precisely. Even then, I found it quite astounding as to how often the music seem to match the film's mood, and it's even been remarked that it's as though the music was actually composed for the film.

The music used predominately comes from recordings I own of Bruckner's 5th, 6th, and 7th symphonies. They are all fine recordings. The recording of the 5th was described by a reviewer as so clear, that he felt he could hear each one of the quarter of a million notes, and that it had the beauty of a mathematical proof. The recording of the 6th, is sometimes cited as the only entirely satisfactory recording of the work. The 7th symphony is Herbert von Karajan's final recording, who's made the most recordings of any conductor.

Over the final credits, I have put a short excerpt from Bruckner's 8th Symphony. This is my most prized recording. It was recorded a year before Herbert von Karajan's death. I include it because Karajan reputedly revered this symphony above all others, and his predecessor as chief conductor at the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, Wilhelm Furtwangler, considered it the finest symphony ever written. I agree – while Beethoven's symphonies are more important, I consider Bruckner's 8th symphony the finest.

To paraphrase Robert Simpson from his fantastic book, *The Essence of Bruckner*, the essence of Bruckner's music is the patient search for pacification. It is not just appreciating Bruckner's music that involves much patience, but also putting the film and music together.

Screening the Film

The film was shot in the aspect ratio 4:3, hence the display should be adjusted to a 4:3 not 16:9/widescreen setting, as the latter setting will distort the proportions.

Bruckner's music involves a great contrast in dynamics, often within a short time, hence the volume needs to be loud enough to hear the softest parts of the music. As a guide, the music begins softly within 30 seconds of the beginning of the DVD, so you should be to hear music from this point onwards.

Feedback

What you are seeing is the culmination of years of waiting and many weeks of hard work and I am grateful to share it with you. Please feel free to ask me any questions or give feedback:

Email: someonetowritewith@gmail.com

Blog: <http://someonetowritewith.blogspot.com>

I have done some checks on all the DVDs I've encoded. However, if you have any playback issues with, please let me know, and I can easily create another copy for you.

The DVD labels have printed on using an inkjet printer. As with commercially produced DVDs, please don't handle the DVD with damp hands or store in humid environments, as this may cause the ink on the label to run.

Kevin Lee, Melbourne, April 2011

Links

Joan of Arc:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joan_of_arc

Joan of Arc trial transcript:

<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/joanofarc-trial.html>

The Passion of Joan of Arc film essays:

<http://www.brightlightsfilm.com/27/joanofarc.php>

<http://archive.sensesofcinema.com/contents/cteq/00/5/passion.html>

<http://www.filmref.com/directors/dirpages/dreyer.html>

The Passion of Joan of Arc (IMDB):

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0019254/>

Carl Theodor Dreyer, director of The Passion of Joan of Arc:

<http://www.sensesofcinema.com/2002/great-directors/dreyer/>

Melbourne Cinematheque:

<http://www.melbournecinematheque.org/>