

0:00 ERIC CHARNOVSKY: Good afternoon everyone.

It's good to see some people here for this wonderful event this part of the Cleveland Silent film Festival and this little symposium we have there this afternoon.

My name is Eric Charnovsky and I'm joined here out on stage, quite privileged to be joined here on stage, by four of the country's finest silent film and theater keyboardists.

Now, this is an art form that's highly specialized, highly specialized skilled that have largely disappeared for many decades, but has been refinized through the movement to represent the performance practice of providing live music during the screening of silent films.

And the standard in the first three decades of the 20th century was just that.

All four of you have experience with this art form, I will be joining Philip Carli on stage today at the piano, but I'm just a novice getting his feet wet, so to speak.

But it's time to meet you and get your take on on the art of playing for silent films .

I'll just get brief introductions of by name.

We have Donnie Rankin here in the corner. Next to me here is David Blazer. Then we have Rodney Sauer, and then we have Philip Carli. And let's have each of you, again, state your name again, just take a minute or two and give us a brief summary of your musical background and where you primarily work today.'s about Don.

1:28 DONNIE RANKIN: All right, we'll get started by Donnie Rankin. The American Theater Organ Society's 2023 Organist of the Year. Primarily, I work at a boring day job, which you have to do. But as far as the musical stuff goes, I've traveled all over the world playing organ concerts and accompanying silent films. And so, you know, thanks having me. It's good to be here.

1:55 DAVID BLAZER Hi, I'm Dave Blazer. And I'm the local one here. I'm the music director at Westshore Unitarian Universalist Church in Rocky River, where we have a

film series. I'm also a house pianist for weekends at the Velvet Tango Room here in Cleveland.

2:15 RODNEY SAUER I'm Rodney Sauer. I'm from Colorado. I've played piano for a long time. 30 years ago, I came across a big collection of orchestral silent film music at the University of Colorado and started compiling scores for silent films from that. So my specialty is working in small instrumental ensembles with my group the Mont Alto Motion Picture Orchestra in Colorado, but also I've started also traveling by myself to various cities to work with local musicians. That's what I'm doing here this weekend last night with Lady Windermere's Fan, and tomorrow night tomorrow afternoon with Buster Keaton's Go West.

2:55 PHILIP CARLI I'm Philip Carli. I'm the resident musician at the George Eastman Museum for presentations of silent films at the Dryden Theater, which is a 450-seat house. I tour as a pianist throughout the country and abroad. I do organ work. And I don't know what else to say. I'm also a film historian and film composer, and I have an ensemble myself, which occasionally play some of the films, about 15-piece groups, which is a little larger than the average .

So I guess that creates some things on. Thank you.

3:43 ERIC CHARNOVSKY No, we all each started off, I assume with piano lessons at some point and some of us moved into the organ. But at what point did you decide any of you to devote your energy toward the specific craft of working with silent films? What was the catalyst that attracted you to working with them?

4:00 RANKIN I'll start it. I actually did things backwards. I started with the organ and then took piano lessons because it got dedicated to the instrument, and they told me, if you want to go further, you have to do that. The silent film stuff came later. My primary focus initially was concert work, but part of my continuing education with the theater organ was, you know, you have to do this.

And so I started with a Laurel and Hardy silent short and realized this is kind of a ton of fun to do and then went down a rabbit hole and started watching more and more feature length silents and realized that, you know, I'm contributing to someone else's art, because these movies are just gorgeous. And I think that's what made it really click for me, was having that opportunity to make something that's already great, even better.

CHARNOVSKY: In a sense, collaborating with the past.

5:05 BLAZER: Well, my grandmother played for this time F back at the Glory Bee Theater in (unclear) Oklahoma and a five year old should just tell me all these stories about dodging popcorn and all this kind of stuff. And then a few years later, my organ instructor got me turned on to play the Mighty Wurlitzer at the Coleman Theater. Went on to do my education in organ, and it was not too many years ago at Eastman. I was attended in EROI, Eastman, Rogster, Oregon Initiative, and that year they were featuring the organ with movies..

CARLI We may have met.

BLAZER: Well, the turn on for me was one of the final performances at Christ Church where The Passion of Joan of Arc that they used with the classical organ, and I sat there thinking, well, I can do that with a church organ. I don't need a theater organ, so that's how I got going.

6:11 SAUER? For me, it was I had played a lot of ragtime and early jazz music, earlier in my career, coming across this big collection of photoplay music, music that was written for silent films and having never encountered it before, not even realizing it was a thing, and then reading some of it and realizing this needs to be revived. And then the response of the audience is always wonderful when you play good music for a silent film and it can be overpowering and it can be very effective and it's a lot of great music. And with Mont Alto and with this group this weekend, I get to play chamber style, each musician, I just let them play what they're going to play. They're we're all listening to each other and it's a a very present, very exciting art form to do part of.

7:03 CARLI: Well, I actually started kind of backwards myself, and then I started being interested in silent films before I started piano lessons through seeing silent films at Disneyland. Because there was a theater in the main streets per section, may still be there, and they had six screens in which they showed silent films. So I was fascinated and I started learning about them through through my single digit years and I started piano at six. ut I was always fascinated with accompanying them, and I didn't get an opportunity until I was 13. And there was one silent dramatic film available in the San Diego circulatung film library, and that was was the Hunchback of Notre Dame with Lon Chaney and directed by Wallace Worsley, and it's a big picture, and I watched it over over and over and over again. And then I thought, oh, maybe I can do this. And so we set up the film at my school for after school, and I played it, my friend Mike Dennis, ran the projector he was with the AV group, and the audience consisted of his sister, who was supposed to drive us home. A couple of the teachers songs in this central mult purpose room, and they asked me if I'd do it for the school. Well, I did, to a surprisingly packed house. It's a long film. And that's really when I started and my parents thought, well, you need to be employed. They were both in colleges. Community colleges, and so they worked on a silent series where I'd accompany and allowed me to program a program. They event.

Wonderful.

All different approaches and experiences, but but here we are all together for the same purpose.

CHARNOVSKY? I did just want to interject on your story to your grandmother, which is that it was extremely common for women to work, especially in small theaters, playing piano, because they were the ones who aud play piano, and there was a huge band for pianists. And I met far more people whose grandmothers played in the piano in silent film theaters than the people whose grandfathers did. And there was gender segregation, I'm sure, in the big orchestras, it was probably all men. But going through these archives, I do come across orchestral arrangements that have a name stamped on them of the rubber stamp, which meant that she was probably the orchestra leader. I have been able to find very few of these people, but they were out there, and I think it's an interesting area to be researched is that the first major paid work for women musicians in America. And of course, what happened to all this poor women in 1929 when they got off.

But your grandmother was one?

CARLI Well, a number of them became big stars on the theater organs, and I mean, on serious, they had followings and a couple of the main recordings. The best ones actually were made at the very end of the '20s for the Edison Company of Henrietta Kamern for the local Lowes Rio theater. She later played organ for the Brooklyn Dodgers. I mean, not shortstop or anything, but she played.

But there are, I think, six sides, extent of hers, playing in the theater, and you get the entire acoustic of this very large house with her playing it and she she plays very softly at times, closes down the all the shutters. But no, they were glamor people in this moment.

CHARNOVSKY Okay, now how is the craft of silent film accompaniment different today than it was a century ago? Obviously, technology would play a role, but how would you anybody respond to that?

11:07 SAUERS I think one of the biggest differences I done is is I worked with these four other musicians to put on a show last night, and that's it. And 100 years ago, we would have been playing all week, that film, and it would have got gotten better and better. Tonight you get a show. And if you're lucky, you get a tour wherever a few weeks, you could be playing scores somewhere else. I'm not a good enough organizer to really line this up, but occasionally you get the same film four or five times in a year, and that's lovely. That's one of the differences, as it was a full time job back then. It's not really a full time job now.

And then the other difference is, photocopies and scanners mean that we work from printed music.

If I were working in 1920, I'd probably have one copy of a piece, so I might only use it once for a score because then I don't have to worry about how do we play it again. Except maybe we have a love theme, stick that off to the side and we're going to need that for cue 17 and cue 24. And the photocopy has made that easier, so that has changed things.

And also, I think we have more time to prepare a score than they had in the 1920s. So in the 1920s, you might get the film on the day it opened. You might not even see it. You had to line up music ahead of time by what, you understood of the film from a cue sheet, or I heard about one, and I've been unable to trace this anecdote. It's a great anecdote, and I should have written it down. It came from a memory of a guy who put three piles of music on the top of the piano. There were love themes, there was chase music, and there was something else. And as he went through the first night, he'd be watching the film for the first time, he had a violinist and a trumpet player. And first one is a love scene. Here's this part. Second scene is this. And at the end of the first night, they had a score, and they used it all week. But we can look at a movie often and spend a couple weeks getting it right. So that is the advantage that's opposed to the disadvantage of, often we only get one or two screenings. Of course, we can save our scores and we .

?? And share them more easily, too, digitally?

Oh, yeah, caption.

13:16 RANKIN: Well, from an organ standpoint, between the Robert Jones home Oregon, the unit Oregon changed, I guess things dramatically, where you didn't have to have the whole orchestra just the one man band, and it was marketed by the Wurlitzer company, which ultimately became the Mighty Wurlitzer.

CARLI Yeah, actually, Wurlitzer bought Bob Jones out, because actually, Jones kept on going bankrupt. One of the people he helped to ruin a little bit was Mark Twain. So Anyway, yeah, Wurlitzer took it..

13:54 BLAZER I'll second what was said about the ability to prepare. I was privileged in 2006 to meet Rosa Rio, who, at the time, accompanied , I can't remember what film it was. It was only be filmed, and I was really impressed, and I knew she was old, but she didn't say how old. And I got to talk to her afterwards, and she said, when I used to do this when these films were new, ..

I know, I would get the score to be the film at the beginning of the week, if she was lucky, she would get the score, and then she'd run through it all week, and then by the time she was comfortable with the film, a new one came in and had to start over fresh. She was 104 at that point.

But, yeah, having the opportunity to see the film now and prepare, you know, it makes the experience better for everyone. And I have often wondered if certain films ended up lost because people just weren't ready to accompany it yet.

14:57 CHARNOVSKY: We're going to be listening to piano for today's film or films, but organ is often the instrument of choice for silent film keyboard as many of us here are organists as well. What are some advantages of using an organ over a piano? And are there any disadvantages? Obviously, one is access, but you're right.

15:19 CARLI Well, I would say, because it depends on the and an organist sometimes I call myself a wooden organist *outman Louis*, an organist in spite of himself, and coming from one to the other, it's a little bit different. It's a little difficult as an improviser, because the difference is with a piano, it's like driving a sports car. With an organ, it's more like managing an ocean liner.

It's not as rapid a turnaround unless you're very very (unclear). And basically, as an organist, I have to rely on combinations and knowing which tank work and avoiding a couple of stops, which nobody wants at all that were invented by Ho? Jones. But for from myself, and it's much easier for piano because it's more fluid for me. But the organ is much more expressive if you get it right.

16:24 CHARNOVSKY Back to the organ, for me, one of the things I love using the organ for is in this because of the way I score the music for the films that I do. Is sustained in sound, sustained sounds that you can have a new organ, sometimes within a movie, just the holding of a note for a brief moment of time to create a special effect of what's happening. I remember one of the best compliments I ever got from someone and they came up and said, part of the film, I didn't even know you were playing. And that that's the approach that I like to take. I don't want to be the, the star. I want them using to invade the storyline that's going on in there.

Marcia McFee, she's a nationwide worship consultant, and she was doing a workshop even though it wasn't a movie, but she was comparing a movie to sometimes in do

worship in churches. And she was running a segment of Under the Tuscan Sun. And we watched a segment of it with some of the subtle background music in it. And then we played it again without music. And what a stark contrast it was, and just the type of music that was done in that is something more approachable for me for the organ.

17:52 RANKIN The thing that I appreciate about the organ, obviously, you mentioned, you know, the ability to find more color than the piano if you do it well. Yeah, you got to do it well. But especially with theater organ, there's the sound effects that are included. I mean, it was a very deliberate design for accompanying silent films, and I chuckle every now and then. I was in Rochester at the auditorium seemed reversing for a concert and a group of school kids was getting walked through. And it's like, perfect opportunity to introduce the instrument to them.

What do you play?

Music from Star Wars? Mediocre response. The dog bark, however? Loved it. So, you know, all that effort, all those years learning that music, you all you have to do is just make the organ bark and kids are sold.

RANKIN? Well, the dog bark on the piano just doesn't cut it.

CARLI but it's also things it's like the dog bar or a steamboat whistle and other effects, traditionally in theater organ terminology, it's called the toy counter.

CHARNOVSKY So if you were there less night, you saw the doorbell that I borrowed from the Radio L Theater, because I forgot my doorbell at home, and it was a bit a bit cumbersome to play from the piano, but I've gotten kind of used to it. I missed one doorbell, but I got the other ones.

SAUER? Well, there's a great scene, I think it's the Circus, Charlie Chaplin, where a dog is barking. And I for some reason, I don't know why I can do that. (woof! Woof! Woof!)

You just do it?

I just do it..

Hubboard Assensitive very versatile.

SAUER? I just we were what's playing at San Francisco, we had several MGM silent films. And of course, we have a lion mark at the beginning, and there's no noise. The first, the first day we just left in the silence, and the audience laughed because there was no sound, and then the second day, I just went, roar! Roar! It was a cheap joke.

CHARNOVSKY How can one teach the art of silent film accompanying? I mean, obviously, you have to have a technique to start up, but what aspects of traditional musical training are particularly helpful for this craft and what about a specialized training?

20:15 CARLI Well, the first thing, because I do teach it to an extent, is we have a couple of (unclear) students at this festival I play in New York. Too, and you have to have some chops to play. But the most important thing is a sense of drama. In other words, it's not good to be a shocking pianist, unless the shyness hides, you know, an actor within , because you have to act a bit when you're a good accompanist, you have to put some character into it. And also, when you have a sense of drama, that makes a sense of pace, a sense of style, and also sometimes a visual sense, but you need pace, and so they you can do emotion and nuance .

And from me to myself, I never play during the lessons I give, because I want to hear them play in their own musical voice, whatever style it is, because I've told them in the theater, you can hear me play any time. This is your time to develop whatever you're going to do, but the most important thing I said is that if you do it with attention to the film, always putting the film first. It's not a concert for you, and exactly what you said, because they should, it's a fine line. It's a terrible thing for ego. Because if you doing it right, you shouldn't be noticed. But as solo musicians, we feed on ego to a degree. So you're on a tight rope emotionally.

And also you tend to get lumped in with the picture. So if you play a great picture, if you don't really have done your best inevitably, they say you're wonderful. And you do your best to save a real stinker. And you're playing on to be injustice you're trying to sell a product. The first thing you usually hear was, "My God, that was awful. That's not cheerful to a musician and you come off the stage.

22:40 SAUER if you're going to take a theoretical approach for musicians, you want to get into this, the way I score my movies mostly improvisation, but I do come up with an overall plan, and I call it the Sonata Theater form where if you have a brief introduction, usually a lot of times it's starting the correct credits, and then we have the exposition where're usually exposing the characters and each one of these characters, I will probably give us some of a leitmotif that I can keep reoccurring throughout as the development comes into play as the storyline develops. And then ultimately, at the end you have a recapitulation, hopefully it's a wonderful ending, and you'll end with the same way that you had started it. And I always pick a key to start off with, and then in the development, it has all of the contrasting keys within it, and I always end up with back to the original key. And if it starts off minor, hopefully I'll end on it on the 33rd major chord, if it's a happy ending.

23:45 CHARNOVSKY And I would think you'd have to, in order to teach that skill, you'd have to have somebody who has any experience in the training of understanding musical for the history behind it.

23:55: SAUER I think one reason Oregon was popular in the theaters, besides the fact that it was a good, loud instrument, and you could replace 30 orchestral players with one organ, was also that improvisation is trained in classical organ lessons. It was not part of a classical music education or pretty much any other instrument. It's interesting to me that improvisation in movie theaters, which was forced. For instance, your grandmother, they would sometimes, at the small theaters they kick the program every day, which when there is no chance to prepare. You just play the pieces you know, and eventually, I think by necessity, you learn how to improvise a bridge. And that's the same time that improvisation starts coming to jazz music as well. And there's a crossover there, I think, that comes out of that.

I was one of the, I think it was in recently elder Re and one of their books, gives the advice that you have of if the film doesn't make any sense, just start with one piece and end with that same piece, and the audience will think it came together . I think we might hear that later today,

25:03 BLAZER? just based on my experiences of learning silent film accompaniment, I think the most important thing to teach is actually the preparation aspect, just outside of the music itself. Obviously, you, I kind of do the same thing with the leitmotif, I come on with, you, various themes for characters, things like that. I studied organ with someone who had their juris doctorate from the Yale Law. So what I learned was you go through, you watch the movie, and you document it, you know, camera changes and just like, you get all the evidence you need , and at that preparation part, I think it is super important when teaching it, that way you're not coming into it blind.

25:46 CARLI Though, I will say, is that from my own experience, is that until quite recently, I had to play a lot of films blind, a lot of them because they were just coming out of the archives and restorations had just been done. So it'd be thrown up on the screen and, the closest thing I'm could tell my students is, if you can't see the picture, see if you can find a trade review, get a trade review or a synopsis from the moving picture world, and you can even tell the great deal just from the program notes, look at the title, that you had to get a little knowledge of the director, look at who the stars is are and who the company is. And then it's kind of like playing a racing form. And then you've got the length of them usually in the original reviews. And so you have kind of an internal clock going on and with the structure, which is it actually comes out to be the golden mean also, Wyen you're playing cold, you know, people say, oh, how do you do that? And I said, well, there's only so many ways the story can go. You know, it's not infinite, you know, and you have to be able to turn on a dime.

You know, it's like a man and a woman meet each other and they embrace and you know, it's very intense. And you study, you can start it with something very passionate, and I say, then the title comes up, "My God, sister, I haven't seen you for years." And then you have to kind of remake that, you know, you turn out the heat to go to another.

27:38 BLAZER My worst faux of preparationparation , I remember, clearly it was the very first film I ever did, Peter Pan. And I had studied it, I had a score all written out

what I wanted to play and the everything was well ready to go. And I rehearsed it with my laptop.

I get into the church to do it, and where my church is, the organ is in the back choir loft and the screen is behind me, and my back is to it, so I have to watch the movie through a mirror. So I'm watching it.

I was realizing, wait a minute, they're coming from the left, on the right. Then the dialogue is all backwards. So I learned the hard way. I must have to memorize the dialogue.

CHARNOVSKY We're going to have a little fun for a moment. Not that we're already having a lot of fun.

We're going to watch a clip from a silent film called Go West, I believe this is going to be shown here tomorrow. And it's featuring Buster Keaton.

We're just going to watch the opening a couple of minutes and ask any of you to respond with, how would you improvise at the piano or the organ in response to the film? How would you interpret it sort of musical ideas would you bring that to the table? So let's go ahead and watch that little bit from Go West.

I wouldn't have started playing again.

29:43 I'll just interject and say right now. Probably playing some sort of hero's theme scene, if you will.

30:05 CARLI In some ways, this opening is similar to Keaton's Our hospitality, but with more comic bits, in that the first title is very serious, and it's kind of, there is no dark gags in the title. So it's almost like you start with a slightly serious premise, and then suddenly the comedy comes in on this. And it grows as the, you know, you kind of have

an undertone of, I don't know, seriousness, but just a little bit of it as the comedy commences.

31:08 BLAZER That's one of the things that I appreciate about the organ is the ability to go from that seriousness with the same theme. It just changes in tempo and registration. Turn it into something that follows the humor that's developed at this point.

CARLI But it's very small scale in humor, really. Nothing particularly out-loud funny, except, you know, there's some absurdity coming along. But even the fact that he's given the \$1.65, well, it's a pile of junk.

32:08 CARLI And It's almost like the opening of a stage melodrama

32:20 CHARNOVSKY? One thing that makes Keaton feel so hard is his stone face. So it's really hard to kind of get an idea where you want to go with them things.

And that's what.

33:40 CHARNOVSKY I was asked to pick a scene that was a little bit ambiguous, and I think this counts, because in Buster Keaton's mind, this is sad sad, almost, I mean, it's comically over the top sad, the fact that he has to buy his own mother's picture back, is rubbing it in a bit. And of course, the dog leaving at the end. And so you could approach it, you could play a very sad piece of the whole thing, or you could play something that's a bit more up tempo. And as you'll hear, this is what we're doing tomorrow, so I had plenty of time to score this ahead of time. And I decided to pick something that wasn't a tragic what they call pathetique, pathetic, which meant a lot of emotion and a lot of sadness, because it's a little too long for that. And so when we do we start with a light Western piece, because that's the opening scene in a movie called Go West. So I want to have a bit of of a Western feel. I picked a piece by Frederick Stahlberg from a sweet he has called Western Sketches, and it's called Evening on the Range. It has a little bit of a banjo thing at the beginning, as it's pulling things out, the banjo type accompiment pizacatto on the violin, and a bit of syncopation, starts gradually getting replaced by a very lyrical theme on the violin, and then eventually it's completely

replaced by it, and it happens to track this film extremely well. It goes out, I've added an extra repeat to it, it's making it a longer. It goes out about when when he gets that little testimonial from the Red Cross gal. And then he walks out and for the dog scene, I go to full on pathetic andante. And then this is where his fortunes start to turn around because the next scene is he's going to go try to hop a train and go to a different town, and we train to different kinds of music . But that is how I approach this. Other approaches are also very valid.

35:43 SAUER Well, initially, if I were in the Oregon, I've already picked up the key, it's could be F major, and I segue with the relative D minor. And I think I would just do some light sustained chords on the strings during the opening dialogue so that the audience can focus on what they're reading and not have to listen to a melody or anything. But it once the scene opens, I kind of go into a Western lilting summertime, type of note effects in the key of F, and then back at the D minor with things go wrong, back then major.

36:21 Yeah, I quite agree with the side. Because there's not much that's actually going on, and the scenes are, they're both focused and a little empty, a very light cut of texture, and that's something I also emphasize is: Don't use too many notes. Lighter is better, you know, less is more. And so. To keep kind of a light , perhaps a movable minor to major theme through the whole thing of leaving, because the opening is really a very serious, you know, some people go through life. And then the second title is just as serious, and then he's hauling all this stuff out. But it's a very light touch because he's going into the store and he gets the \$1.65. Then it all vanishes, and then's progressively getting it's sadder and sadder in a mocking, you know in a way that you going like, what next? And then at the very end, when he sits down at the dog, it's kind of like, I always think of like a bassoon trailing off as the dog walks away,

37:50 CHARNOVSKY and this this is only in the first four minutes.

37:52 RANKIN: Yeah, but all I do do a lot with especially Buster Keaton is you think you are I didn't know what you're going to hear, but then I hesitate and make the audience feel that hesitation that they see in his face also.

CHARNOVSKY Let's move forward. I have some questions actually for individuals on stage as you Officer experiences and specialties. Philip, as a scholar of early film and film music music, you've studied and taught this art form and how it developed, but when taught talkies became the standard and live film accompanying became less common , what would you say was lost in the terms of spontaneity and the theatricality of film screenings?

38:35: CARLI Well, it's interesting. Of course, that was the transitional period where right when some of the films were at their zenith in terms of both emotional and technical you know, just sheer technical brilliance, then talking stuff in and they're working to develop that from the start again. And it's always interesting to see the transition. But the thing I think you get when talkies start being quite different, which is late 1930, 311, you get less audience involvement. It's much more tiring to watch a silent film than it is to watch a talking film, because everything's been given you and, you know, with the music, and you can think about what's going on on the screen. That's one of the, there has to be, you can just watch it in inside more often because you know where this is going and the dialogue's going. You can go out and get a drink or something.

But if you really call about silent film, I've seen the audiences just riveted, they won't move. They won't move. That's and the accompaniment often does that because you lead them. I always thinking of myself as an interlocutor. I'm there and I'm supposed to help bring a bridge to the film.

CHARNOVSKY Donnie has a theater organist, what sorts of activities do you participate in? They're not specifically playing for silent films.

40:28 RANKIN Well, if you can do it with a theater organ, I've probably done it, the concert work, obviously, has been a big thing, where it starts to get unusual. I don't know if anybody in the crowd remembers there was a restaurant in the Cleveland area called the Lamplighter, which had an organ in it, and it was a steakhouse, and somebody would sit there and play the organ while you ate dinner.

That stemmed out of pipe organs in pizza parlors, which were everywhere at one point, and there are now three left in the world, one in Milwaukee, one, the Phoenix area and

one just outside of Chicago, and I've picked up shifts in two of them. And the kind of music that you have to play there, Disney music, you know, stuff from films, whatever kids want to hear, the requests that you get. One of my personal favorite, The Star Spangled Banner, but the Star Spangled Banner played on the Ducks. So it's pretty hokey, but it's a lot of fun. It's a paid practice session, really. But yeah, I mean, you tried to work with the other musicians, that's more organ is weird. You can do it all on your own, you don't need other people, but that gets really boring. So I try to, you know, do stuff with other musicians, drummers, piano players, small orchestras, whatever. So, yeah, just about anything, in addition to the film work.

42:01 CHARNOVSKY Rodney, your ensemble, you talked about the Mont Alto Picture orchestra is actually a quintet. Why did you decide on the specific instrumentation? Tell us what that is, and why the name orchestra purchased by five musicians?

42: 17 SAUERS I think there was one of Richard Kazarski's books. He quotes a survey, this was in a trade magazine for theaters, and they were curious about the people who subscribed to the magazine of how they used music in their theater. There's not a lot of this research. It's very difficult. You can't just go somewhere and find out how many theaters have a large group or a large ensemble. And the quiz started out, how many men, it said men, how many men are in your orchestra? Do you have a soloist? Do you have two people or do you have an orchestra? And is your orchestra three people, four to six, and it then had some divisions. And people would answer, and probably they were answering not just how big is your orchestra.

How's your big is your orchestra on a big night, because they probably changed the size of the players, depending on the show. It was fairly common to start the afternoon, maybe with organ, and then if you had an orusster, they'd come in and they'd do a shift from 4 to 6, and then they'd take the dinner break break and the organist would come back in, regardless of where the film program was, you would switch at the hour because you know, if it was a Union town, especially.

But also, that's how musicians organize their lives. And so you might be watching a big film and it's got the orchestra or something that.

I'm I'm getting distracted.

So I decided to pick orchestra, partly because that's what this would have been called back in 1922 or 23. Also because the instrumentation I chose, a piano, violin, cello, clarinet, and trumpet, has a tiny piece of each section of the orchestra. Occasionally, we'll play with drums, especially if it's a piece of film that's high in in dance music or in military scenes. I've expanded the group to nine people for our presentation of Beau Geste, which we did at the Turner Classic Movies Festival in March, and we'll be reviving it again and in San Francisco, or technically Orinda, in November.

And so what I did for that was we added drums, we added bass, we added viola, we added a second trumpet, because Beau Geste takes place in a military environment, and there's a lot of horns in the music that's chosen. So it is a variable sized orchestra. Orchestra is controversial for a five piece group. I don't think there's a standard definition of what an orchestra is. These guys play unit orchestra. That's getting small.

44:53 CARLI Well, you, if I could add, I mean generally three people can be considered an orchestra. And you can see that in Sherlock Jr, there's just three people in the pit.

(unclear: And usually, Eronel Ropays not in the picture moves, but the other way) you're doing with is he gives the precise list of what you should have for various songs.

45:18 SAUERS So if you have three people, you should have a piano, the violinic cello. If you have four people at other violin, he actually uses like.

45:26 CARLI Well, there's one thing that that's inescapable and Paul is a drummer. There's a drummer in every single one of those.

SAUER: When you get up to a certain number, but it's not the first, it's three or four.

CARLI Well, if you look at Sherlock Jr . the third player. Yes, it's a drummer?

SAUER No, piano violin and drums was actually very common, and that's because that's going to be a small enough group that you can improvise. Because you really don't got two people who are playing music. You've got another person who can follow along with a rhythm. And I have actually done experimental film scores where I play an accordion with a pianist and a drum. And the piano and accordion, we go out of our way not to necessarily prepare very much.

If there's a scene that we need to prove prepare for, for instance, if we're doing Pandora's box, there is a scene at the end where the Salvation Army choir comes in. So we need something that sounds like a hymn, what are we going to play? But other than that, we're just making it up as we go along. And it's very fun, and the audiences seem to like, and it's not authentic. Very to 1920s. It's authentic in that some of these groups were just making stuff up and I did meet a drummer once at the senior center in Boulder a long time ago who had played in a trio, drums, piano and violin and he said they would spend the afternoon listening to the radio and stealing stuff. He was very proud of the fact they had not spent a nickel on music. The whole career, they would just play what they had heard on the radio, or probably they had had a bunch of stuff in the back of their head and if you start playing, you know, whispering or I'm forever blowing bubbles, then everybody knows how it goes. It's like being in a jazz combo that is not doing concerts but it's doing background.

CHARNOVSKY It's a perfect segue because I was going to ask David extensive experiences a jazz pianist. You mentioned you play in the Velvet Tango Room. How has that informed your process with improvising for silent films? Can you incorporate any jazz idioms into your own silent film scoring?

47:22 BLAZER Well, when you play four hours at night with no music, you kind of get used to this. I've always been comfortable with just improvising, especially when it gets to times when people are there, in the bar, and they all start singing along with what you're playing, you kind of get tired of that. So I make sure I make up something different that they like. And I actually came up with some very lovely melodies over the years when it did Sunrise, the movie, I actually created a theme song for it. Remember when movies had theme songs, and you would go to the music store by the sheet music and had it done for your wedding and all that that kind of stuff. For many years, I was kind of keeping track of some of these melodies that I was doing, and I was going to make an album called themes in search of a movie.

CHARNOVSKY And then someone will license it, and it won't from its movie.

48:19 CARLI Well, the pianist Neil Grand does this as a demonstration when he's giving talks about accompanying motion pictures and he's and he gives a talk about plausible moving picture as he's playing it. And after that he's an actor as well. So he can say, okay, then we move into a seg a section, this could be happening with our hero and his father.

And you know, he'll go and listen, and he's, yeah, just he'll tuck in some dramatic twist.

48:55: We just saw Buster Keaton, I think you you'd agree that Keaton was popular and really sold his character through his facial expressions and his movements. What are some of your who are some of your favorite silent film actors? Are there actors whose, expressions or movements, are particularly engaging and inspirational to you as somebody who makes music for those films?

49:25 BLAZER Well, I found this sort of new to comedies a couple years ago, but I had never done it before. It was, I don't know, it just seemed to be more comfortable with dramas and things like that. So I did the Charlie Chaplin City Lights, and that's when I fell in love with Charlie Chaplin. Every year I put one of his films in my series.

SAUER I always enjoyed Claabot when she is on the screen, it's very hard to look away from her. The same thing we said of other actors and actresses, but also everything that goes through in her head, she is able to communicate through her face. So if something surprising happens, you've got the first reaction, you've got her thinking about it, you've got her second reaction, and it's all lit, and that's a lot of fun. Of course, the way I play, I'm usually playing the same piece throughout that, and she is communicating the changes. It's not necessarily coming from us. But that is one of the limitations and strengths of doing the compilation score method is that you're kind of stuck with a piece for a while. But that means you're letting the actors and actresses pace themselves on the screen.

I also like (unclear) very much. For a similar reason she just communicates what's going on in your character's life very clearly through her expression.

RANKIN Rage of emotion, I have always been impressed by Brigitte Helm in Metropolis, plays both sides both sides of the character arc so well.

SAUER Yes, if you haven't caught her in other films, I recommend the Wonderful Life of Lena Petrovka, where she plays a far more realistic character, which is not a criticism of Metropolis. Metropolis is a very stylized film, and it succeeds on that. But in other films that she is in, she is a very powerful actress, and was quite human when she was on the screen.

51:20 CARLI It's funny, it's hard for me to pick an actor actors particularly, because I love it what they do, and everybody can do this and because all these actors and actresses were, you know, very few, there were some that were a lot lumped into , you know, character and comedians were comedians, and dramatic players, even heavies, villains making turned around, I tend to look at directors, then the at the cast and what they're going to do, you know, what they could do with them. Because I'm kind of thinking, oh, you know, this could be a really neat combination. Though, I must say, Clara Bow, you can't miss with Clara Bow. It's just wonderful. And another actress that I've recently, because of some work I've been doing, just came back into my mind.

It's one that nobody will hear of you. Outside of the gentleman here, I well have known as it Alma Rubens. Who had an extraordinary grace and elegance about her. She was a dark haired woman, very lithe, very thin. Unfortunately, she had a drug habit, and she died very young. She never made a Well, she made one part talkie, but the disks that that have been lost. But her eyes, it's always in the eyes. If you get somebody with tremendous eyes, and then it lights up, you know, it just ends.

CHARNOVSKY If we have time for one more question I wanted to ask this for all of you, with almost a century now, really, of standard film scoring, prerecording music in the studio for movies, what, if anything, do you think is, be honest, is improved or hindered in terms of synchronization with action on screen? In other words, how was the music itself itself really changed with prerecorded films, the standard for the movie industry today?

53:32 SAUERS I would add so, when not I do my compilation scores, I am not very synchronized with the film for almost the entire score. Unless there's a special effect at school, which you will get in Go West. But I watch a scene. It's like, what's good music to support this scene? And I edit it to fit and we play that. And if something funny happens, we're not talking about that. The audience is talking about that. They're gonna laugh. They're going to hear each other laugh, and that accents the comedy. That is one way to score. I'm not saying it's the only way to score, but it's how it was usually done certainly by orchestras, it was Sal Palira, was you did not go, you know, someone's walking across the room, you're not going to necessarily acknowledge footsteps. You're not going to necessarily change your emotion when people move in when they stop. It was just too much effort, and it also has a drawback in that it can interrupt the musicality of what you're playing if you were trying to follow something besides the musicality that's in the piece. So playing a piece from start to finish is probably going to sound better than chopping it up in the bits that happen to line up.

When you're improvising, that's very different because you could watch it, especially if you compared. It's like, okay, I know it's going to fall down the stairs. We're going to accent that. That's an extreme example, but there's smaller examples you can think of too.

In modern movies, a lot of times it's a screen very tightly to the action, you also have the sound effects, you have dialogue, everything's coming in on top of the music, and the music is in the background. And if you get a soundtrack recording, sometimes you'll specific I didn't never even notice that they were playing this theme. And it's because the movie is too loud. And I think that's a drawback to modern movies is that the music gets subverted to dialogue with sound effects. And people definitely, especially musicians, noticed that in the 1920s. There were quite a few composers for silent film music who retired when the talkies came and they were not interested in in that degradation as they saw it of their art film.

55:35 CARLI Well, it's kind of an evolutionary thing, but in some ways, many modern films have reverted to what happened at the beginning of the sound era, is that you really don't get very much music in many films. It's in between sequences. It doesn't underscore dialogue. It's on its own, and sometimes it's very underlinguished on its own. It's merely illustrative. It doesn't have much core to it as a musical composition, but it's between the dialogue. When talkies came in full throated at 29 and 30, the only music

you would get would be for the credits often. And for the end title. The rest of film, there was no music. And that only started to change around 1933, which was a complete change from the wall to wall music. But this is what we have now in most modern films.

Also, this is a recent tendency within the last 20 years, you don't get opening credits really much anymore, I've noticed. So that there's no music to prepare you for the drama that is to follow. You plunge, basically right into the film.

SAUERS: After the silent lion roar, right?

57:07 CARLI Yeah. And maybe you'll get the two stars' names and the title. And maybe the director. And that's it. But then you get everything at the very end, you know, when everybody's leaving for the theory. But that's where you get most of your music, right?

CHARNOVSKY Well, I think we need to stop now, but thank you all four of you with this wonderful opportunity for me.

I'm as I said at the beginning, I'm just starting to get into a film I've been hearing with these experienced veteran experts and it's been very inspirational. I hope for all of you too to hear these insights from these wonderful folks up here on the stage with me. We're going to take a short break and about 3 o'clock will be back with a couple of Renee Clair films.

Thank you very much.