

## THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA (1925)

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### 2018-19 PEDALS & PIPES SERIES

Dennis James, organ

CAST:

Lon Chaney, Sr.  
Mary Philbin  
Norman Kerry  
Arthur Edmund Carewe  
Gibson Gowland  
John St. Polis  
Snitz Edwards  
Mary Fabian  
Virginia Pearson

**THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA**

*Directed by Rupert Julian*

*Produced by Carl Laemmle*

*Based on a Novel by Gaston Leroux*

*Adapted by Elliott J. Clawson and*

*Raymond L. Schrock*

*Cinematography by Milton Bridenbecker,*

*Virgil Miller, and Charles Van Enger*

Sunday, March 17, 2019 @ 3 p.m.  
Seegerstrom Center for the Arts  
Renée and Henry Seegerstrom Concert Hall

The Pedals and Pipes Series is generously sponsored by  
**Valerie and Barry Hon.**

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SOUTH COAST PLAZA  
COSTA MESA

OFFICIAL TV STATION

**PBS**  
**SOCAL**

# PROGRAM NOTES

## “The Phantom of the Opera”

There is a beauty and a beast in the mythic plot of *The Phantom of the Opera*, but this story is no fairy tale. Instead, its depiction of the lonely, deformed man who haunts the inner reaches of the Paris Opera is a horror classic of early cinema. The title character’s portrayal by the movie’s star, Lon Chaney, was so graphically ghastly that viewers reportedly screamed and fainted when he first appeared on screen, and his make-up secrets were the talk of the nation.

The making of *Phantom* reads like a horror story in itself. It began auspiciously enough, in 1922, when Carl Laemmle, president of Universal Pictures, was on vacation in Paris. There he encountered author Gaston Leroux, a movie writer who had published a novel about an agonized, lonely, deformed man who haunts the secret halls and cellars of the Paris Opera House. The film-savvy Laemmle, who had a special fondness for the Paris Opera, knew this story had the makings of a hit: it had glamor, violence, horror, a colorful setting, and—most of all—a perfect starring vehicle for the great Lon Chaney to follow his triumph in *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. Laemmle wasted no time in buying movie rights to Leroux’s novel.

But during the production of *Phantom*, things went downhill quickly. Conflict between director Rupert Julian and his cast was bitter and open; reportedly, the defiant Chaney simply directed himself in many scenes. In its initial screenings, the film was a shambles, and re-takes and re-edits changed the emphasis of the story back, forth and back again—from adventure to horror to love story. Yet somehow, the horror classic that the world embraced—transcending its source material and eventually inspiring a Broadway musical—took shape.

### Musical Accompaniment

*The Phantom of the Opera* posed unusual challenges for master organist Dennis James. The original score for the picture, prepared for full orchestra by composer J. Carl Briel, has been lost to time. But it probably melded original material with quotations from Gounod’s opera *Faust*, which figures largely in the movie’s story line, and which was the most popular opera in France and the U.S. in the 1920s. For James, this meant developing a wholly new score for a horror-thriller whose subject is not only musical, but operatic. Music is embedded in the action. And, like opera itself, the action is spectacular and the emotions intense. All the more reason for turning to a majestic concert organ—with its wide range of colors, textures and sheer sonic power—for a musical soundtrack.

This kind of precise, highly expressive dramatization was not always within the scope of the film organist, notes James, who is the foremost exponent of the art. Originally, the music that accompanied silent movies was more modest, often intended to mask the noise of the projector. But as the music evolved, it greatly intensified the viewing experience. Its practitioners had to combine musical skill and flexibility with a sure-footed sense of cinematic drama. Audience expectations were high, and so were the sheer numbers of musicians involved in

creating the music that made movies come alive for audiences nationwide.

To construct a musical accompaniment for today’s viewers, Dennis James reviews scores and sources of the era, preparing detailed cues for use in performance to match the drama’s editorial assembly and emotional pivot points. Once he has documented every segment with its intertitles, plot action and cuing opportunities, he begins the process of choosing historically appropriate musical sources from his personal scoring library—the largest such private collection in existence, with contributions from musicians, studios and libraries around the world. With *The Phantom of the Opera*, James demonstrates the power of the film accompanist’s art to ignite our imagination as we watch and listen.

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*Michael Clive is a cultural reporter living in the Litchfield Hills of Connecticut. He is program annotator for Pacific Symphony and Louisiana Philharmonic, and editor-in-chief for The Santa Fe Opera.*

## DENNIS JAMES

organ



Dennis James has dedicated his professional career to the theatrical traditions of organ performance and furthering public interest in the pipe organ. From the time he began performing

concerts while still in his teens, James has been at the top of the organ profession. He has played virtually everywhere pipe organs are to be found, from the spectacular movie palaces throughout the United States and Canada to the most prestigious concert halls and theaters in Europe and Asia.

Born in Philadelphia in 1950, Dennis James began formal organ training in that city at the age of 12. He attended Indiana University's School of Music as a student of concert and church organ performance, earning his Bachelor's and Master's degrees under the tutelage of Dr. Oswald Ragatz. Highlights of James' early professional career include his New York City recital debut at St. Patrick's Cathedral and a two-year appointment as staff organist at the largest pipe organ in the world, the Wanamaker Grand Court Organ in Philadelphia.

His organ-with-symphony-orchestra concerto debut was in 1984 at Chicago's Orchestra Hall performing Handel's Concerto No. 13 in F, "The Cuckoo and the Nightingale," with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. His many European concert tours have featured several return engagements at Vienna's famed Konzerthaus to perform at the historic five-manual Rieger concert pipe organ; this included a featured all-Europe organ convention performance shared with renowned French concert organist Marie-Claire Alain. In recent seasons he has had his Sydney Opera House concert hall debut (three sellout performances) and was the premier performer for the Singapore Esplanade Concert Hall pipe organ.

For more than 40 years Dennis James has played a pivotal role in the international revival of silent films with live music. Beginning as an accompanist for university screenings, James now tours worldwide under the auspices of his Silent Film Concerts production company presenting professional silent film programs with accompaniments ranging from solo piano or theatre organ, to chamber ensembles and full symphony orchestras. Performing to film at an ever-increasing number of sites throughout the world, James is celebrated for providing the most comprehensive selection of authentic silent films with live music presentations available today. James recently performed sellout silent film programs with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra at Orchestra Hall and the Dallas Symphony Orchestra at Meyerson Symphony Center, and his international silent film presentations have been seen most recently in Canada, Mexico, Australia, New Zealand, England, Singapore, France, Germany, Austria, the Netherlands and Italy.

A featured solo performer on the international film festival circuit, James appears regularly at the annual Los Angeles, San Francisco, Washington D.C. and Philadelphia events as well as the Pordenone and Rome Festivals Cinema Muto. He may be seen frequently at the National Gallery of Art, the Walker Film Center in Minneapolis, the Cleveland Cinematheque and for the Chicago Art Institute, the Louvre Museum in Paris and the Palazzo Delle Espisozioni in Rome. James has performed programs under the auspices of the American Film Institute, National Film Registry, Museum of Modern Art, Library of Congress, Pacific Film Archive, George Eastman House, American Federation of the Arts, UCLA Film and Television Archive and the British Film Institute.

Dennis James serves three simultaneous professional positions: House Organist for Seattle's Paramount Theatre, House Organist for the Historic Everett Theatre and Theatre Organist for the San Diego Symphony. He also appears regularly as silent film organist for the Stanford Theatre in Palo Alto, California Theatre in San Jose, Castro Theatre in San Francisco and the Uptown Theatre in Calgary, Canada. James' career has included such professional appointments ranging from House Organist at the Lansdowne and Brookline Theaters in Pennsylvania, the Paramount and Rivoli Theaters in Indiana and the final employed Resident Organist for the national landmark Ohio Theatre in Columbus. James performs frequently at various California locations including the State Theatre (Monterey), Arlington Theatre (Santa Barbara), Paramount Theatre (Oakland), Berkeley Community Theatre and annually at the famous outdoor Spreckels Concert Organ in Balboa Park (San Diego). James also maintains a long-term performing relationship at New York's "Showplace of the Nation," Radio City Music Hall, which includes solo organ concerts, variety performances and multiple appearances with orchestras in accompaniment to silent films.

### THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS: VALERIE AND BARRY HON

Pacific Symphony would like to extend special thanks to Valerie and Barry Hon for their generous sponsorship of the organ series. Their dedication to Pacific Symphony as well as their love of the incredible William J. Gillespie Concert Organ is evidenced by their making possible three organ-specific performances. The Hons' generosity and love for the arts can be felt throughout the community.