



WELCOME TO SLAPSTICK FESTIVAL 2022!

SCREENING NOTES

An Old Gangster's Molls (1927)

(a.k.a. The Lovers of an Old Criminal/Milenky starého kriminálního)

CAST	CREW
Jan W. Speerger.....Pardon Vlasta Burian.....Cyril Pondělíček/Alois Kanibal Anny Ondráková.....Fifi Házánková Emilie Nitschová.....Fifi's Mother Jirí Hron.....Fifi's Admirer Betty Kysilková.....Stephanie Lesczynská Jindrich Plachta.....Kristián Rudolf Suva.....Anois Pivonka	Director.....Svatopluk Innemann Screenplay.....Josef Skružný and Elmar Klos Story by Josef Skružný Cinematography by Otto Heller Art Direction by Alois Mecera Assistant Director..... František Jerhot

An Old Gangster's Molls marks a highpoint for the Czech filmmaker Svatopluk Innemann and his frequent collaborators, among them the screenwriter Josef Skružný, with whom he made a total of six silent films and two talkies over 13 years.

Innemann gravitated towards Skružný's particular skill at constructing humorous folk stories, frequently based around the confusion created by mistaken or mixed identities, or characters with physical doppelgängers. In the 1920's this kind of material was ideal for pushing the boundaries of silent cinema and experimenting with the fledgling art-form. If devised effectively, it was a perfect setup for mining comic situations and was also fun for audiences to see their screen heroes play a variety of roles in the same film.

Both already established talents within their own crafts, Innemann and Skružný first worked together on the comedy *The Green Car* (*Zelený automobil*, 1921), and inspired by this creative relationship made two more films back-to-back the following year; *The Clerk* (*Komptoiristka*, 1922) and *Venoušek and Stázička* (*Venoušek a Stázička*, 1922). They continued this collaboration with another essential contributor to the team; the comic performer Vlasta Burian, who joined them for a trilogy of films from 1926; *The Little False Cat* (*Falešná kocicka aneb Když si žena umíní*), *The Loves of Kacénka Strnadová* (*Lásky Kačeny Strnadové*) and today's film *An Old Gangster's Molls* (1927). These were Burian's first roles on film, but he was already well known to Czech audiences through his theatrical and cabaret appearances, which preceded World War I and continued after the war had ended, when he founded his own theatre. This substantial stage experience served Burian incredibly well when he transitioned to the screen, not only in his development as a performer of visual comedy, but also because he had a ready-made following to fill cinemas. His legacy has maintained with Czech audiences who still regard him as 'Král komiků' – the "King of Comedians".



Svatopluk Innemann's wife, Zdena Kavková had played the leading female role in *The Loves of Kacinka Strnadova* but was replaced in *An Old Gangster's Molls* by Anny Ondráková, who wowed the screen as the charming and energetic Fifi Hrazankova.

Ondráková, later known as Anny Ondra, made her mark in the annals of cinema legend when she appeared in Alfred Hitchcock's films *The Manxman* and *Blackmail* (both 1929) becoming not only the first Hitchcock blonde, but also the first foreign-language dubbed actress in film history. She later appeared in over forty sound films in which she spoke her native language.

Another noteworthy achievement for *An Old Gangster's Molls* was its pioneering use of a promotional reel of film to raise awareness of its forthcoming attraction in cinemas. Filmed separately to the feature, this scene showed a young couple held up by a robber in the forest. After forcing them to divest themselves of some of their clothes and belongings, the robber finally steals their most valuable property – two cinema tickets for *An Old Gangster's Molls*. This cunning promotion ensured that audiences were well aware of the forthcoming attraction prior to its release. We now recognise this as a teaser trailer, shown before a feature whenever we visit the cinema, but in 1927 it had not been done before. *Robber (Lupic)* is the title of this ingenious and original screen advert for *An Old Gangster's Molls*.

The film's cinematographer, Otto Heller, was another frequent collaborator with Svatooplak Innemann from 1918 onwards. Heller moved to England in 1938 to escape the Nazi menace and became a British citizen in 1945. He continued to work as a director of photography on hundreds of films including Ealing's *The Ladykillers* (1955), as well as *Peeping Tom* (1960), *Victim* (1961), the Michael Caine "Harry Palmer" films; *The Ipcress File* (1965), *Funeral in Berlin* (1966) and *Billion Dollar Brain* (1967) and another Caine classic *Alfie* (1966). He returned to comedy as well, for the Morecambe and Wise film *That Riviera Touch* (1966); part of an incredible filmmaking career spanning 50 years.



For more information on the restoration of *An Old Gangster's Molls*, please visit the website link: www.praquealchemist.com