

RESTORATION ROW COMING SOON FROM THE FRONT LINES OF FILM PRESERVATION



THE ITALIAN STRAW HAT & TWO TIMID SOULS
René Clair | 1928 | Cinémathèque Française

SPINELESS FIDGETY GROOMS, nervous young brides, steely grande dames, hot-tempered men of wide girth, mischievous children, mustachioed bureaucrats, lawyers and justices full of hot air, level-headed women and their doddering, droopy-eyed husbands... Look long and hard enough at any shot in René Clair's two adaptations of a 19th-century vaudeville playwright named Eugène Labiche, which were the great comic filmmaker's final silent features, and it takes on the character of a cartoon strip.

Watch the films *move*, on the other hand, and what emerges is their thrilling and curious pace. Born in Paris two years before the turn of the century, Clair had a special gift for stretching out a scene, heightening tension, and piling stress upon stress. Neither *The Italian Straw Hat*, a hyperventilating comedy of errors about a young man's attempts to save an aristocratic woman's honor on the day of his wedding, nor *Two Timid Souls*, a deftly arranged feature Clair shot in a breathless two months, have much more plot than a one-act farce. Instead, their comic tension comes from the way in which Clair prolongs every gag up to—and often past—its breaking point.

The two *timides* of the second film, a nervous young lawyer and the father of the girl whose hand he's pursuing, spend every scene in



which they appear stalling, hesitating, and putting off taking action. It's their indecisiveness, rather than the increasingly manic incidents that accumulate around them, that gives the movie its taut energy. Of Clair's two Labiche films, *The Italian Straw Hat* is better known and rightly loved, but *Two Timid Souls* is the buried treasure: a reminder of how rich a comedic visual language the movies had developed before the coming of sound.—Max Nelson

New and forthcoming restorations:



^ *Adelheid*, František Vlácil, 1969, National Film Archive of the Czech Republic
 Case for a Rookie
 Hangman, Pavel Juráček, 1966, National Film Archive of the Czech Republic



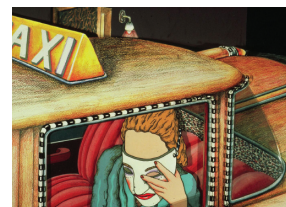
^ *A Character in Need of Support*, Pavel Juráček, 1963, National Film Archive of the Czech Republic



^ *The complete Carlos Gardel on film*, various directors, 1931-35, Fundación Cinemateca Argentina. Pictured: *Luces de Buenos Aires* (31)
Mister Radio, Nunzio Malasomma, 1924, Austrian Film Museum



^ *Old Czech Legends*, Jiri Trnka, 1953, National Film Archive of the Czech Republic



^ *Films by Susan Pitt, 1971-2006*, Academy Film Archive. Pictured: *Asparagus* (78)



^ *Les Misérables*, Henri Fescourt, 1925, La Cinémathèque de Toulouse
Pre-revolutionary films from Cuba, various directors and years, Cinemateca de Cuba (in collaboration with the UCLA Film & Television Archive)



^ *Spring Night, Summer Night*, J.L. Anderson, 1967, UCLA Film & Television Archive



^ *Syncopation*, William Dieterle, 1942, Cohen Film Collection
Why Be Good?, William A. Seiter, 1929, Warner Bros.