

► Swiss, Chinese musicians offer swinging soundtrack for vintage films



# SILENCE IS GOLDEN

By Xie Wenting

HOPEING to attract Chinese fans of silent films, the Institute of Incoherent Cinematography (IOIC) has embarked on its China tour that runs from today until September 27. The Zurich-based institution that promotes silent films with live band performances has chosen Zajia, a project space based in Beijing, as its local partner, with screenings to also be held at the Temple Hotel and Yugong Yishan. A total of 21 silent films, mostly from the lo-fi and science fiction genres, will be screened with 18 participating musicians from both China and Switzerland serving up a live soundtrack.

"We will screen silent films for people who are already interested in this form of cinema and others willing to give it a try," said Rong Guangrong, owner of Zajia.

Silent films might be relatively new to China, but they enjoy a long tradition in Europe. The custom of playing live music for silent films dates back to 1895, when a pianist performed in accompaniment at the screening of nearly a dozen films by the Lumière Brothers in Paris. Since then, the involvement of live bands in silent films has become a lasting legacy.

Musicians participating

in the tour haven't had the opportunity to rehearse together. They will provide improvised performances for people viewing the silent movies.

"Different types of music ranging from classical jazz to rock and even electronic music will be presented in accordance with each film screened," said Rong. "There is no set rule for performing and all the musicians will perform based on own understanding of the film."

Each screened film will be accompanied by either a duo or trio of musicians. After the screenings, there will be a joint concert featuring 11 musicians from both countries. Chinese musician Yan Jun's

Improvisational Committee together with musician Simon Berz and other Swiss counterparts will prepare an improvised piece accompanying Austrian-American filmmaker Fritz Lang's film *Metropolis* (1927).

Silent films, which enjoyed their golden era from 1894 to 1929, remain appealing among a niche group of cinema lovers even today, said Julien Tang, manager of Zajia.

At the 16th Cannes Film Festival, French silent film *The Artist* (2011) directed by Michel Hazanavicius, was nominated for 10 Academy Awards and won five, including Best Picture and Best Director.

"Films nowadays are trying to make use of advanced technology such as 3D effects to stimulate audiences, but none of them can compete with silent films that brim with liveliness," said Rong.

According to the IOIC, the 21 movies that will be screened are classics produced from 1902 to 1925 including *A Trip to the Moon* (1902) directed by Georges Melies; *The Electric House* (1922) directed by Edward F. Cline; and *Trip to Mars* (1924) directed by Dave Fleischer.

*A Trip to the Moon* was the first science fiction film ever made, inspired by Jules Verne's novel *From the Earth to the Moon* (1865) and H.G. Wells's fantasy story *The First Men in the Moon* (1901).

Distractions like blurring and pixilation might occur from time to time on the screen, but Rong said this will only serve to reignite nostalgia among audiences.

A 3.8-meter-wide screen will be used to screen the films to an audience of 60 people at Zajia's main performance space in Doufuchi Hutong, Dongcheng district. The festival wraps up with a concert over two days at 2 Kolegas on September 26 and 27.

**Where:** Zajia, Jiugulou Dajie, 23 Doufuchi Hutong, Dongcheng district

**When:** September 12-16, 26-27

**Tickets:** 50 yuan (per day), 100 yuan (three-day pass)

**Contact:** 8404-9141

## What's on

### Thangka exhibition @ National Museum of China

Jointly launched by the Ministry of Culture and the Tibet Autonomous Region's government, this thangka art exhibition opened at the National Museum of China on Monday.

About 100 of the elaborate silk paintings with embroidery, some from the Potala Palace in Lhasa, by 50 contemporary artists will be showcased.

**When:** 9 am-5 pm, until September 25

**Where:** National Museum of China, 16 Chang'an West Avenue, Dongcheng district

**Admission:** Free

**Contact:** 6511-6188 or info@chnmuseum.cn



See the charm of thangka paintings. Photo: douban.com

### Rock tribute night @ Yugong Yishan

A live show paying tribute to world-famous rock stars including Elvis Presley, Guns N' Roses, Bob Marley, Marilyn Manson and Nirvana will be staged at Yugong Yishan this Friday night. The concert will see Chinese bands Long Jin, Velvet Road, Not There, The Gray and Army of Jade Kirin breathe new life into classic rock anthems.

**When:** 8:30-11:30 pm, Friday, September 14

**Where:** Yugong Yishan, 3-2 Zhangzizhong Lu, Dongcheng district

**Tickets:** 50 yuan

**Contact:** 6404-2711

### The Frantic Fevers @ Mao Livehouse

Shanghai-based Japanese punk rock band The Frantic Fevers hits Mao Livehouse as part of their national tour this Sunday night. Why Reason, Brother Tough, Bedstars, Dr. Liu and Human Centipede perform in support.

**When:** 9-11:30 pm, Sunday, September 16

**Where:** Mao Livehouse, 111 Gulou Dongdajie, Dongcheng district

**Tickets:** 40 yuan

**Contact:** 6402-5080



**Above:** *The Artist* (2011) Photo: CFP  
**Below:** Danish silent film *The End of the World* (1916) Photo: Courtesy of IOIC

