KINONIK



Sunday March 16th 7pm
Live Scored by Carolyn Swartz

The Portland Conservatory of Music
28 Neal St.
Portland 04102

Tickets: $15 / $10 Members

ASPHALT Tickets

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Asphalt (1929), Joe May's silent masterpiece, opens with restless urban energy: a city in motion, and all the tumult contained within.Towering structures dwarf inhabitants, rendering them powerless against an unstoppable urbanity. Amid Weimar-era Berlin's streets, danger lurks—not from gangsters, but in the guise of a woman.

Considered the final Strassenfilm (street film), Asphalt presents Berlin as a labyrinth of temptation, where moral certainties dissolve. At its center is diamond thief Else (Betty Amann) – when caught stealing, she crosses paths with Sergeant Holk (Gustav Fröhlich), an upstanding policeman whose moral fortitude gives way to desire. Asphalt is more than a love story between a policeman and a thief; it reflects Weimar anxieties about the modern woman and the erosion of tradition. Else embodies the era's construct of the female criminal as an irresistible, psychotic force. Weimer criminologists linked female crime to vanity, sexual deviance, and the city's stimulation. Else mocks necessity as her motive, flaunting her jewels and fine clothes, "Necessity, does this look like necessity?" Her crime is not desperation but desire–and she challenges every norm pursuing what she wants.

The contrast between Holk's bourgeois home and Else's citylife apartment reflects the film's central conflict: modernity versus tradition. Holk's resistance, surrender, and tragedy mirror societal fears of shifting gender roles. Though Else is imprisoned, Holk remains ensnared. The final image—a metal grate separating them—captures this paradox: she is contained, but so is he–waiting for her return, with no way to know if she is truly repentant. Asphalt is both crime melodrama and cultural document, where desire is inseparable from danger, and the most potent criminal force is a woman armed with a smile and style.

Trivia: Originally only available in a shortened version, a print was rediscovered in 1993 which contained approximately 10 more minutes of footage and a different ordering of scenes.

Asphalt was Amann's first German film, after struggling to find success in Hollywood. It would be her most significant role.

Joe May's daughter tragically committed suicide after her fiance left her for Marlene Dietrich. Asphalt and other films May made after this loss often take a more melancholy tone and feature parental anxieties about their children's romances.

Carolyn Swartz will be live scoring **Asphalt** on the fabulous Steinway B at the Portland Conservatory of Music. Our 16mm print of **Asphalt** was struck by the

Vienna Film Archive for use within their facility. Seeing this on film is a rare event!

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